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plus

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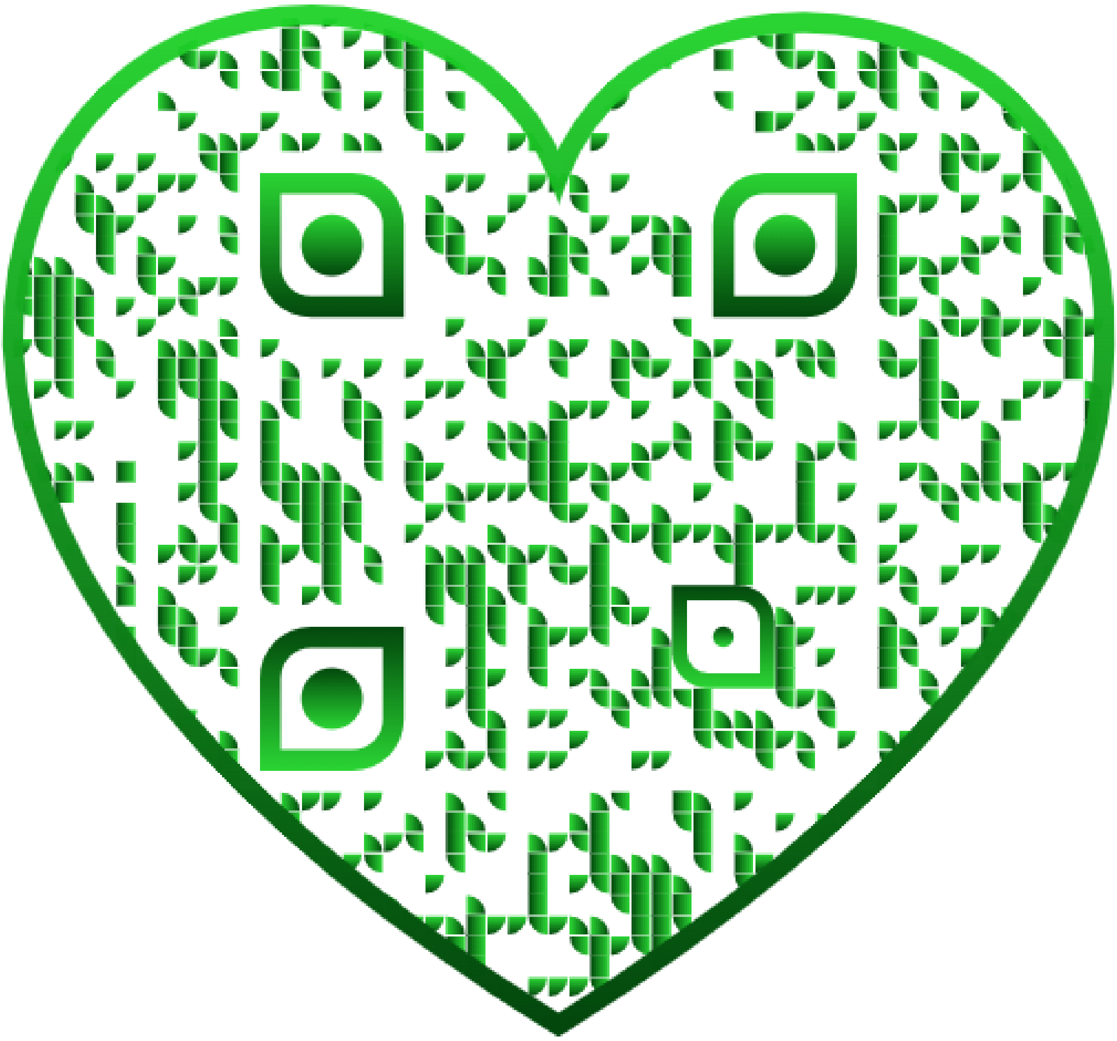

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Kim, Queensland

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Under My Wing
Elaine Janes

Elaine's chooks at the beach, and her book. **Below:** Green Connect Farm.

Chooks with a difference

Although we don't have Jessamy Miller's regular poultry column this issue (it will be back soon), I did want to mention a sweet, self-published book I've not had room to fit in the review pages.

Elaine Janes – who Jessamy wrote about in our Winter 2022 issue (OG 134) – has become quite a celebrity in the poultry world and has now written a lovely story about her chooks and their amazing abilities, from enjoying a visit with Elaine to her local cafe, to bodysurfing and skateboarding!

Called *Under My Wing*, the book tells in Elaine's words the stories of her chooks, how she raised them with love and strength, and how they changed her life. The trick seems to be not seeing her chooks as simply destined for the chook house, the garden and egg laying, but that they can in fact try almost anything!

Elaine writes about one of her chooks: "Flapper and I soon became very well known at coffee shops, beach locations, playgrounds and parks. She always went wherever I went in the car. Her calm, confident attitude promoted conversation with people. Children loved seeing her."

Meanwhile, Mrs Chook learnt to ride waves at the local beach – and there is a photo to prove it. It sounds extraordinary, but then many poultry lovers have had special relationships with their chooks – there's much more to them than many people realise.

As for this latest issue of *OG*, I've written a story on my visit to King Island (off the north west tip of Tasmania), where I went to visit relatives earlier this year and came across the extraordinary forest conserver Kate Armstrong and the precious plants, trees and wildlife she is protecting. Read about her conservation efforts on page 78.

There are many more highlights: from Simon Webster's interview with philosopher and animal rights activist Peter Singer (page 85), to the wonderful urban farm, Green Connect, that helps refugees get work and life experience in a new country (page 36).

On the growing front, Karen Sutherland writes about heat-loving flowers to plant now (page 16) and native plants you can use for making summer drinks (page 18). Connie Cao writes about the amazing dragon fruit and how to get the best flavour from them (page 26), while Jian Liu profiles vegetables you can grow that will survive the heat of summer (page 20).

Phil Dudman also gives an overview of the essential organic gardening techniques and latest products for all aspects of your garden (page 30) – a worthy read for beginners and the more experienced.

And lastly, whether you grow your own summer fruits or just love eating them, we tell how to bottle excess and save it for the cooler months (page 64). It links to our gorgeous cover by Annemarie Bolduc showing irresistible plums and peaches at the height of harvest time.

You can order Elaine's book from amazon.com.au as a paperback or ebook.

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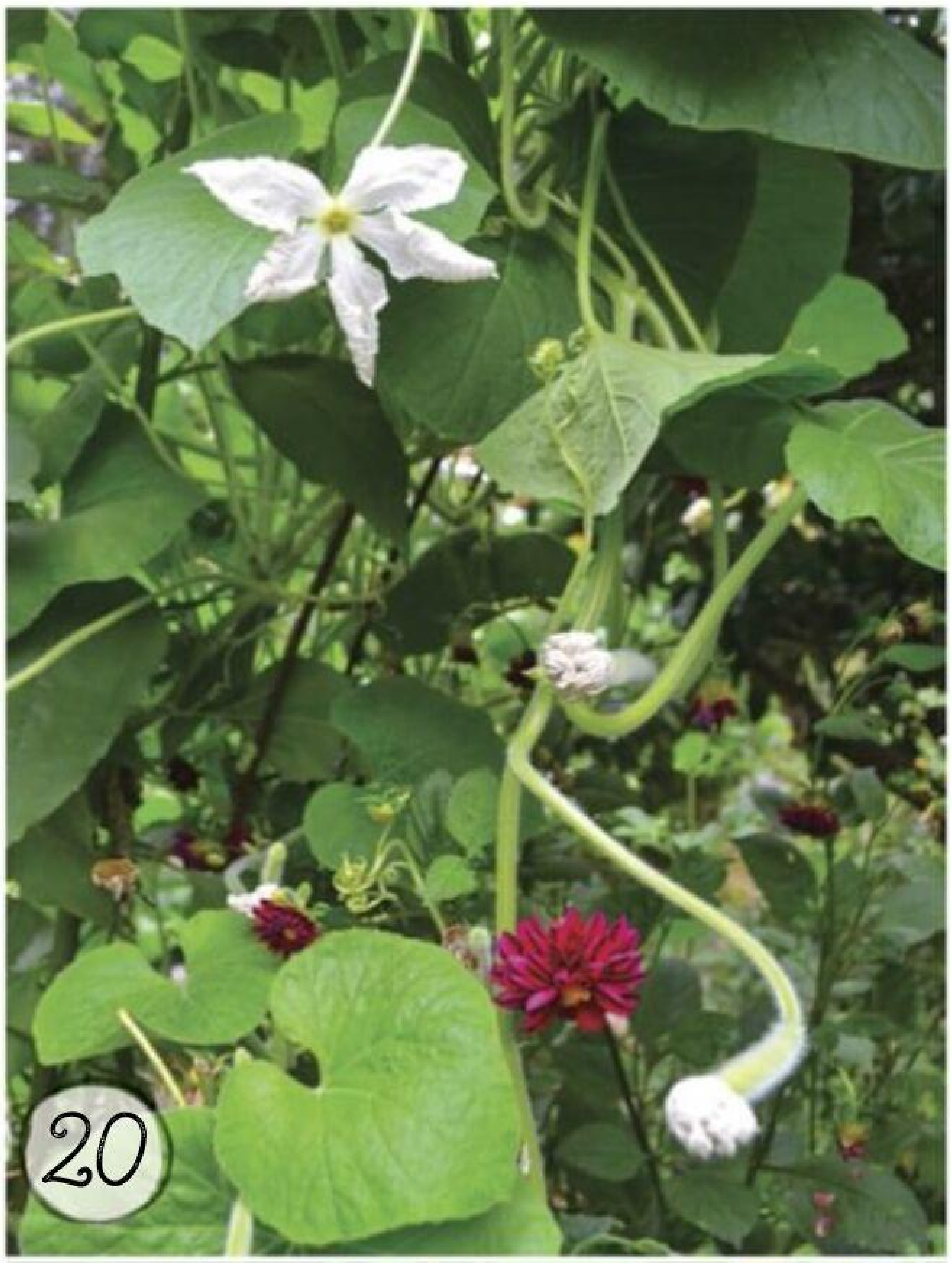
Our cover

Summer fruit, fresh from the garden, is a harvest made for sharing. Read the article on page 64 for tips so you can bottle your crop to give to friends or keep for later.

organic
Preserve summer fruit
organic essentials



COVER PHOTO: ANNEMARIE BOLDUC @BOTTLE&BRUSHSTUDIO/FROM TOP: JIAN LIU/ISTOCK/PHIL DUDMAN

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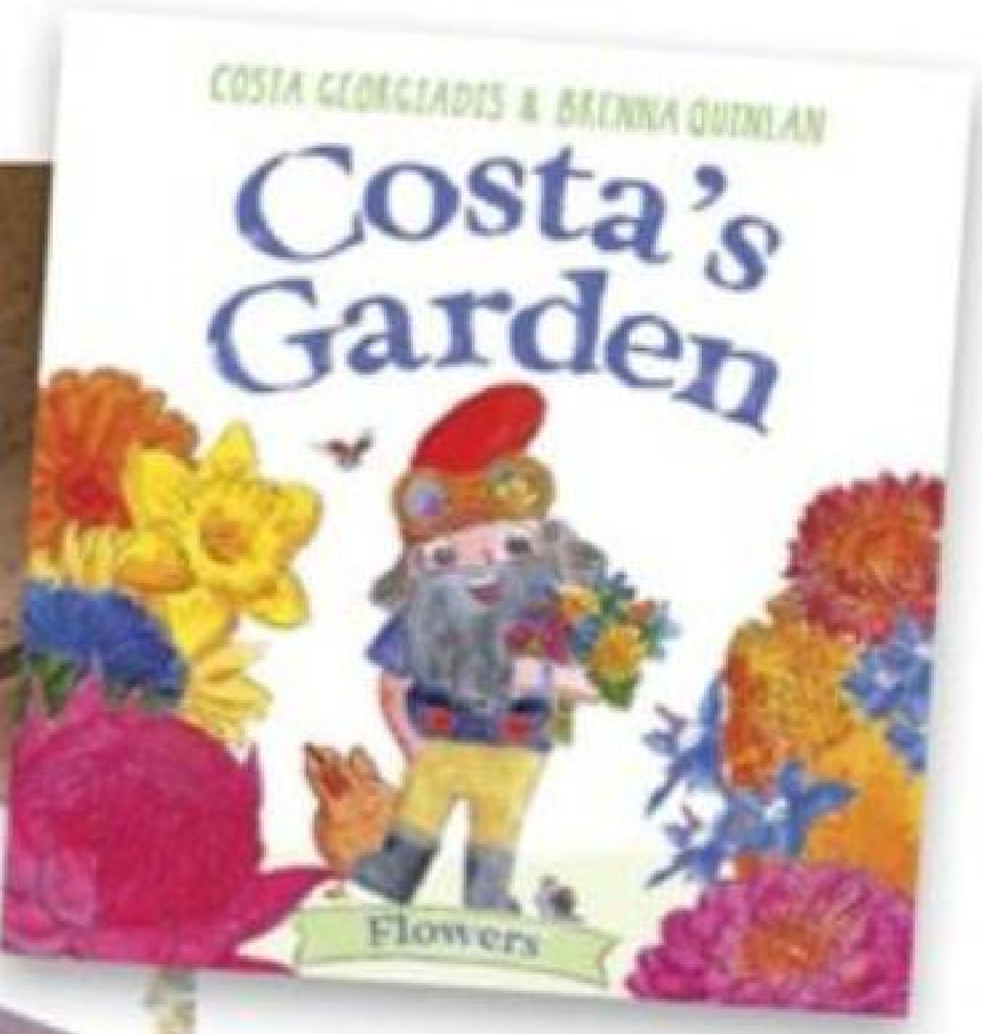
COSTA GEORGIADIS & BRENNA QUINLAN
Costa's Garden
Flowers

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WORTH OF
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ABC *Organic Gardener* magazine acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the First Australians and traditional custodians of the lands where we live and work.

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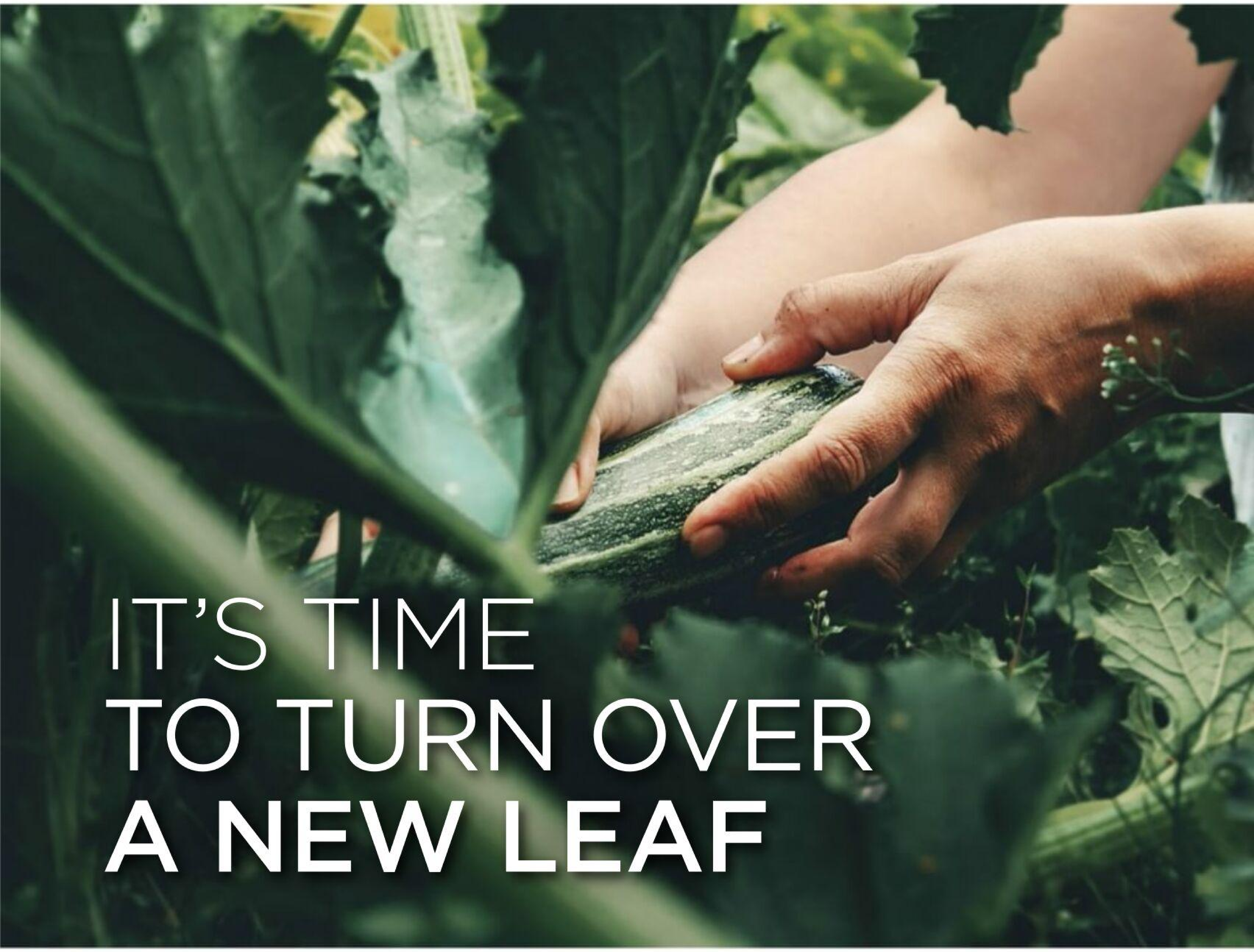

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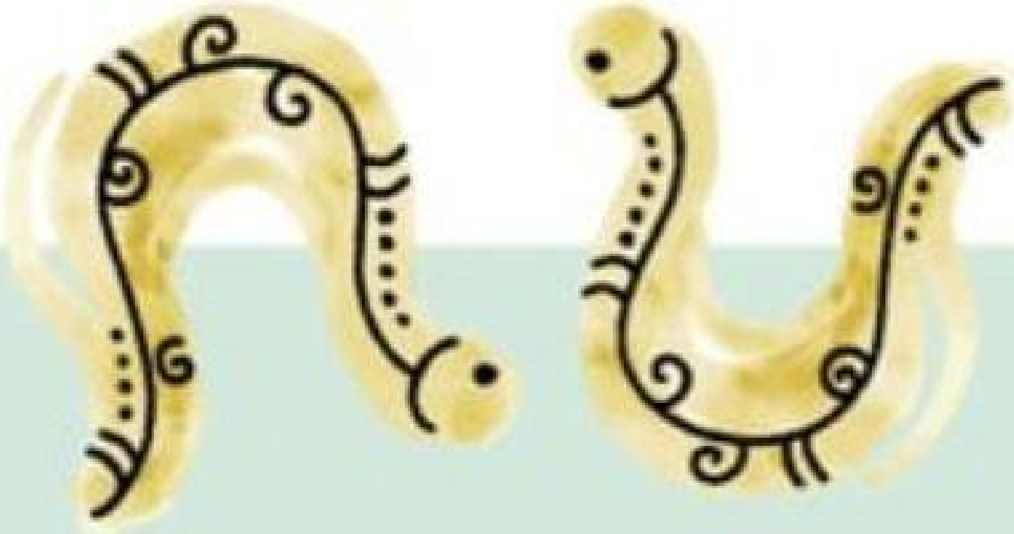


CAST IN GOLD

I have a worm farm, but am unsure what to do with the castings. Should I dilute them and use as liquid fertiliser? ***Elizabeth.***

Dear Elizabeth,
Worm castings are a wonderful, concentrated plant food that can be used in numerous ways. Any nutrients and minerals that go into the worm farm will come out as castings (also known as vermicast), containing millions of beneficial bacteria and other organisms great for your soil and plants. Castings and leachate (any liquid) have a better range of nutrients when worms have been fed a variety of kitchen waste.

- Use a handful of worm castings mixed into soil when planting seedlings, or as a side dressing for perennial edibles such as rhubarb, sprinkling it on the soil surface around the plant's base and watering in afterwards.
- By adding just enough water to your worm farm weekly to keep it moist, you can harvest the leachate to make your own liquid fertiliser, or worm tea. Do this by diluting 1 part leachate to 9 parts water so it's the colour of weak tea and apply it with a watering can. Use every week to boost vegetable and flower seedlings, and every fortnight on other edible plants, especially heavy feeders such as citrus. You can use a stocking if you want to remove any fine silt so that your filtered worm leachate doesn't clog up the rose on your watering can.
- You can also make a slurry or liquid fertiliser with a handful or two of castings mixed in a 9 litre bucket full of water. This can be used to feed most plants and even pot plants.

Karen Sutherland

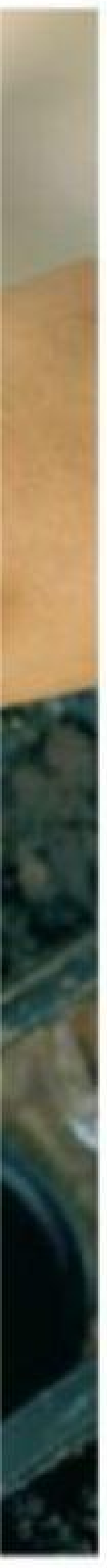
PHOTO TOP LEFT: ANN STEVENS

KNOW YOUR STATICE

Last issue (OG 152), in our watering article on page 35, we mentioned a number of drought-tolerant plants, one of which was sea statice (*Limonium perezii*), widely sold and planted.

However, Sue Pamplin from central Victoria called up to say that her garden is overrun with statice, which has spread from a neighbouring property. This prompted us to clarify that you do need to choose the right species. Sue's weedy outbreak relates to *Limonium lobatum,* a listed common weed in Victoria and regarded as an environmental weed in Western Australia and South Australia. We should also mention that *L. perezii* has been recorded as a weed in South Australia (although not yet treated as invasive) and that gardeners in the state should avoid growing it or keep a close eye on it.

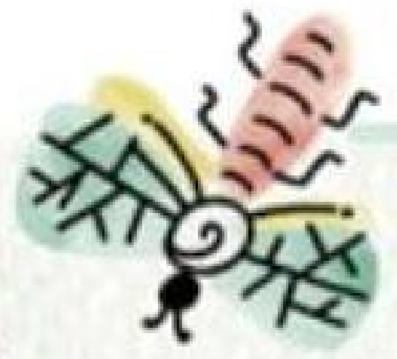
Above: Sea statice (*Limonium perezii*).



BEWARE ILLEGAL FRUIT NETTING

This message from a wildlife carer came through social media, asking if we could remind everyone about the fruit netting with large mesh that is illegal in Victoria but which can still be purchased from a variety of stores and online, and which is doing immense damage to wildlife. The netting allowed in Victoria must have a mesh size of 5mm x 5mm or less at full stretch. Larger mesh netting has the potential of trapping wildlife, including flying foxes, possums and birds, so they get entangled, leading to deep cuts, strangulation and often death as they try to escape. In fact, no matter what state you live in, buy only the mesh size referred to above.

The wildlife carer went on to say: "In particular, grey-headed flying foxes have had a terrible year of getting caught in this netting (along with a mass starvation event along the east coast). I'd love to believe that if people knew the danger to wildlife, they would take action to remove old netting and purchase legal netting. The amazing carers are desperate for further education in the community."



GET IN TOUCH

Please include your town/suburb. Photos are also helpful, and any details such as climate and soil. The more information we have the better.

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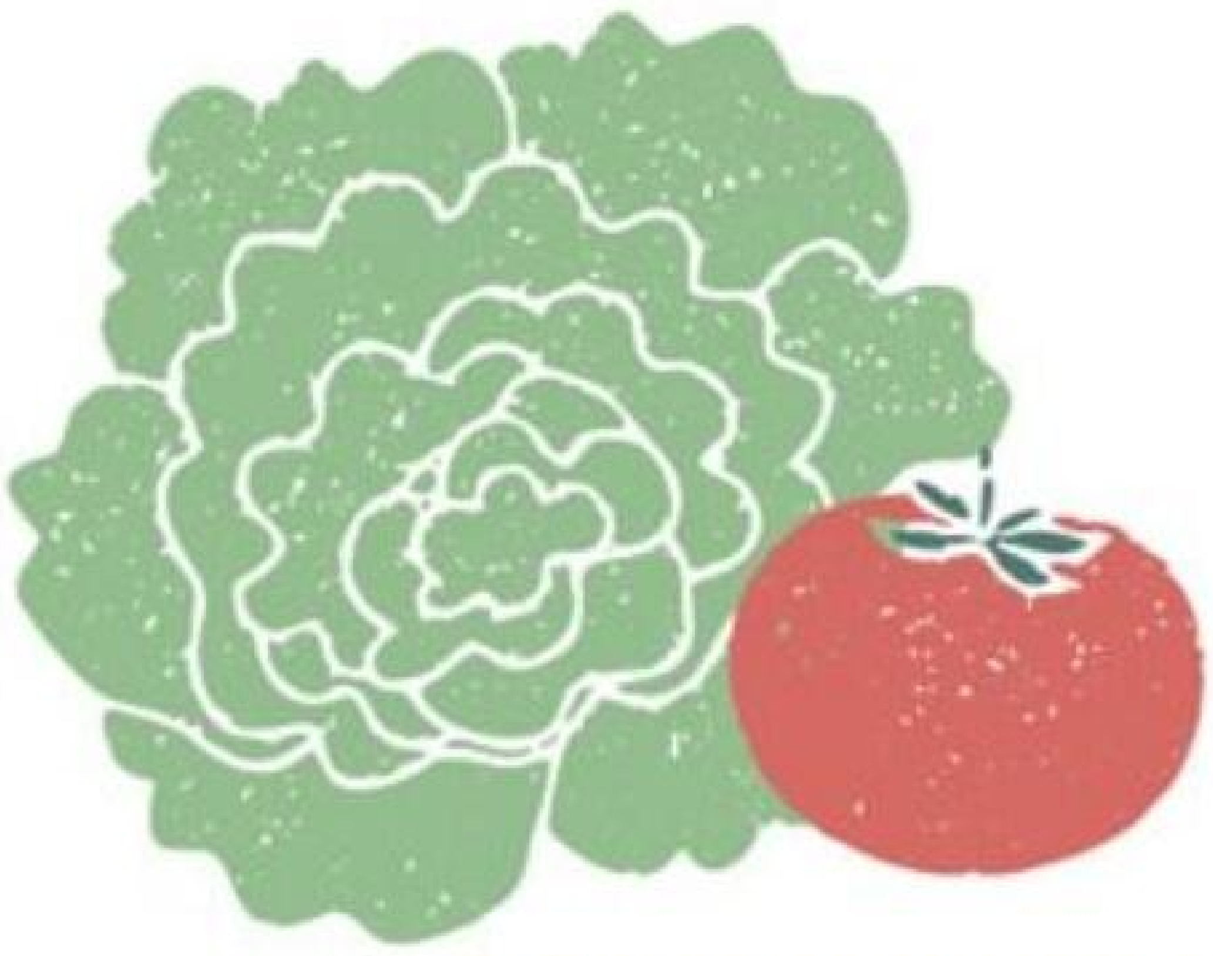


COMMUNITY GARDENERS CELEBRATED

The best of the country's community gardens and gardeners were celebrated and awarded in November by Community Gardens Australia. Held at Country Paradise Parklands, Nerang, Qld, the awards covered a range of categories.

The Community Gardener of the Year Award for 2024 went to Gemma Garcia Mandanas of Riverwood Community Garden in NSW. The award is for "a quiet achiever who is always there to support others".

The Riverwood garden team said of Gemma: "Gemma Garcia Mandanas is an extraordinary member of our garden. She manages the compost area, separating greens from browns, and participates in every workshop and working bee. She also collects vegie scraps from local grocers, maintains the green waste, and regularly provides refreshments for fellow gardeners. As a single mother battling stage 4 cancer, Gemma views her involvement as a way to give back, and to support her mental health."

The Community Champion of the Year award (for gardens that reach out to their communities) was won by Gapuwiyak School Community Garden, Gapuwiyak Aboriginal Community, Arnhem Land, NT. The garden started in 2020 from community concerns about food security during the pandemic when fresh food couldn't easily be delivered. Students at the school suggested they start a food garden, which was created in a derelict patch of dirt behind the school shed. Four years on, they have harvested just under two tonnes of cassava, one and a half tonnes of sweet potato, hundreds of kilos of tomatoes and other vegetables. There is also a continuous supply of papaya and bananas from the garden.

Among other winners were Northey Street City Farm, Windsor, Qld, for the Permaculture Champion of the Year. Northey Street is a pioneer of the city farm movement and continues to be a standout permaculture demonstration site. It prioritises diverse plantings, runs a community composting hub and integrates bees, chickens and worms into its system.

Details: communitygarden.org.au

ILLUSTRATIONS: ISTOCK

WINNING PICTURES

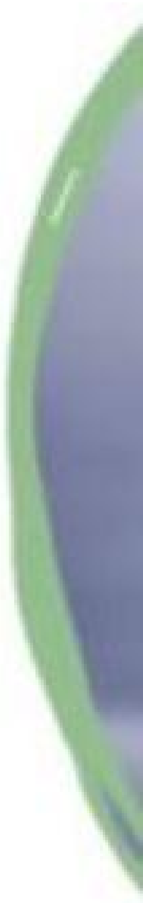
The stunning results are in on the 2024 Pollinator Photography Competition that featured as part of Australian Pollinator Week in November. The aim was to encourage photographers to capture the beauty and fascination of Australia's bees and other pollinators, and the finer details of the world around them.

The first place in the open section went to Paul Harrop from Queensland with his image of a native bee, *Lipotriches* species. Paul was the open winner last year as well.

The people's choice award went to Jennifer Leayr from New South Wales with an image of the swordgrass brown butterfly (*Tisiphone Abeona*). There were also prizes for primary and secondary schools.

For more information on how you can help pollinators, and to see the full list of winners and their photography, go to: australianpollinatorweek.org.au.

Right: Paul Harrop's winning image of a native bee.



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Off-grid festival ready to roll

The latest Off-Grid Living Festival and camp-out will be held from April 12–13, 2025, in Chiltern, Victoria. There are well over 250 exhibitors in 10 festival areas, including energy and technology, home and building, bushcraft and survival skills, homesteading and self-sufficiency and farm and garden. It's a great event to learn about all things off-grid.

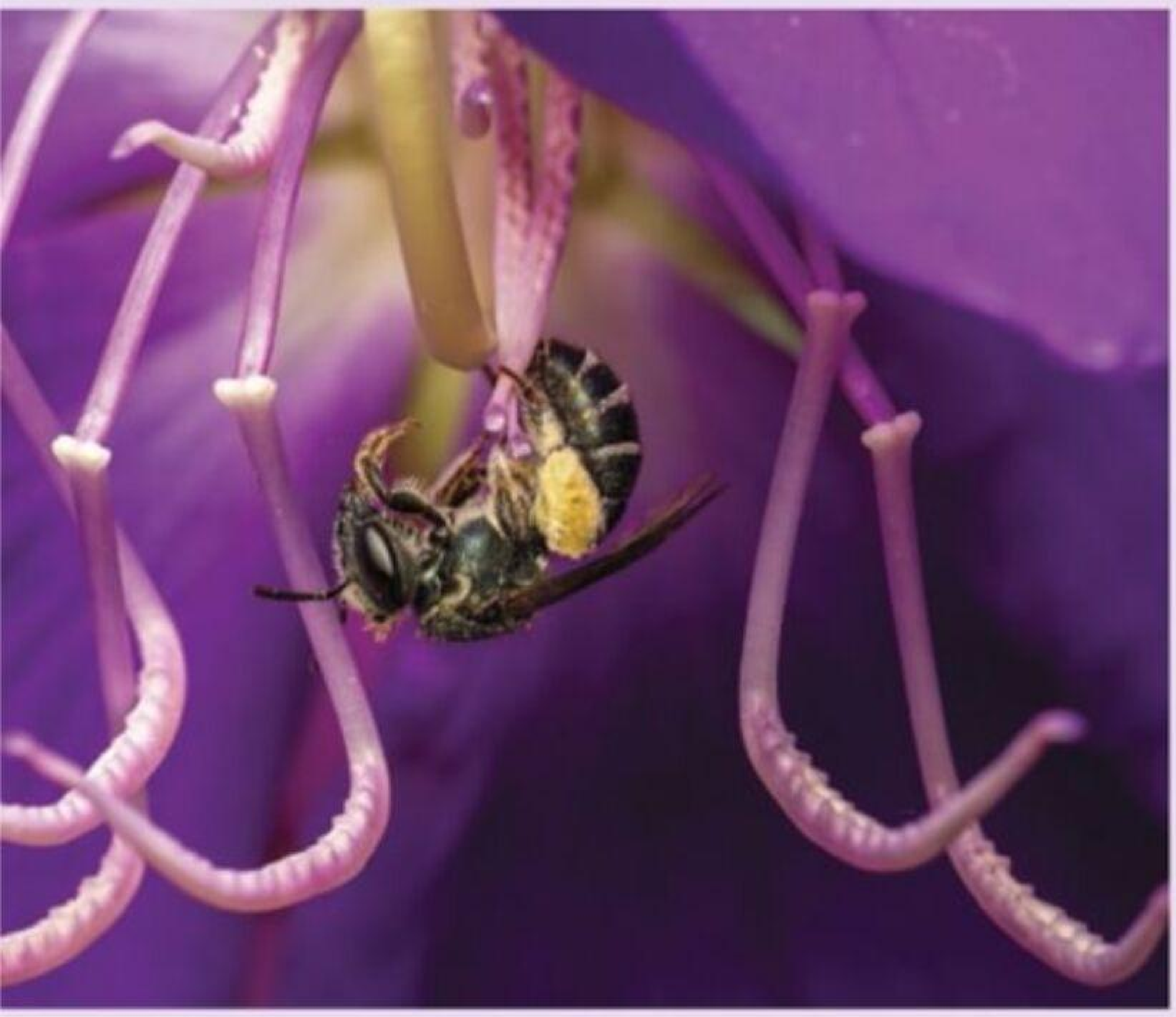
In 2025, the festival is also running some inspiring competitions to get people designing and innovating for our future. These competitions aim to engage directly with young students and artists of all ages. There is still time to get your entries in as entry times have been extended, but be fast. The three competitions are:

Solar Punk Art Competition – Artists creating sustainable, futuristic public art.

Pedal Power Competition – High School Students designing and building inventions that are powered by humans pedalling.

Future Thinkers Competition – Children's 2D artwork presenting innovative ideas for a sustainable future.

For all the details on the festival and competitions, go to: offgridevent.com.au



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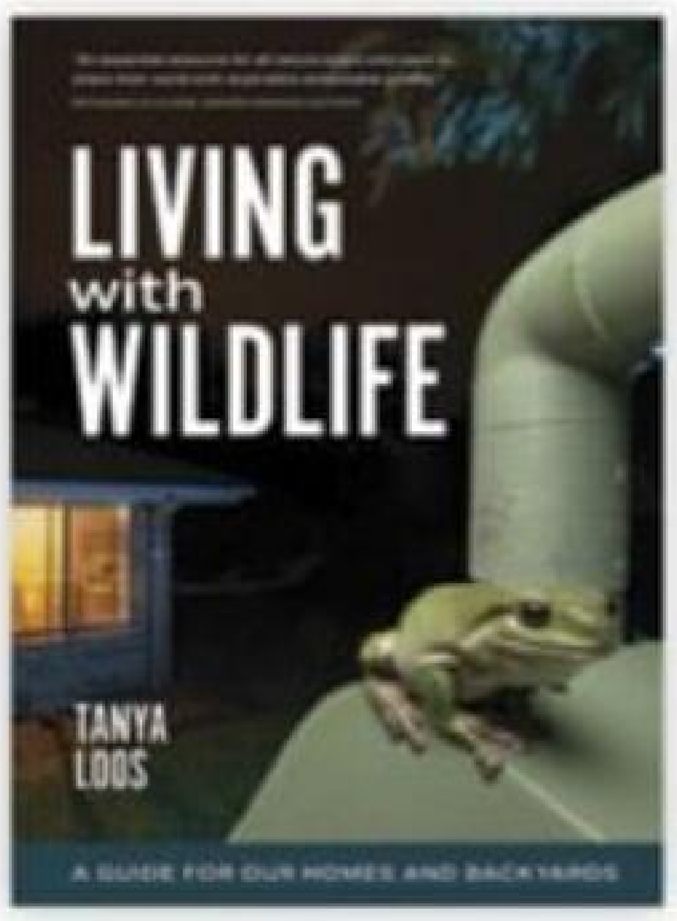


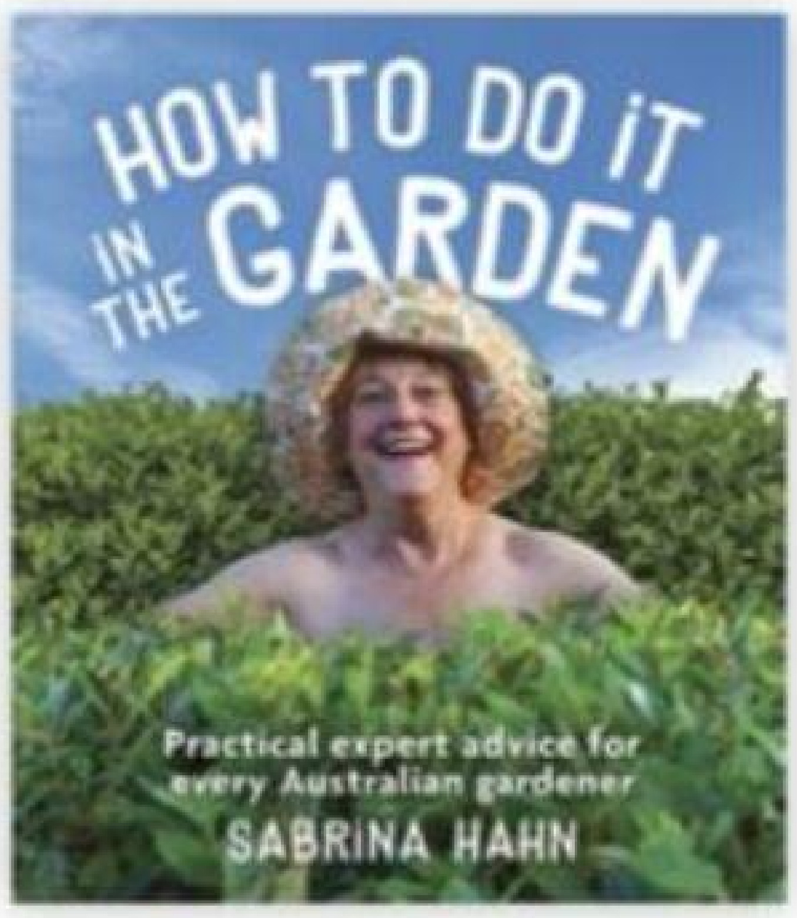
LIVING WITH WILDLIFE

Tanya Loos

CSIRO PUBLISHING, 2024

Encountering wildlife makes us feel good. Most Australians live in urbanised centres, formerly native animal habitats. Naturalist, Tanya Loos, presents a superb guide on sharing our spaces with rosellas, quolls, bandicoots, bats and others. *Living with Wildlife* explains that unconventional gardens and habitats are safe havens for wildlife during bushfires, heatwaves, droughts and floods because they provide security cover, shade and water. One way to engage children in the backyard is to create micro habitats, like making frog ponds and insect hotels, suggests Loos. The section on helping wildlife in trouble is excellent. We are reminded that speed kills, millions of creatures die from car strikes annually. Living in harmony with nature requires empathy, respect, kindness and a willingness to coexist with our kindred planetary family, the animals.

Reese Halter



HOW TO DO IT IN THE GARDEN

Sabrina Hahn

FREMANTLE PRESS, 2024

Sabrina Hahn is a gardening legend in Western Australia, where she's been on ABC Radio for close to 30 years, spreading her no-nonsense approach to gardening. A horticultural professional, podcaster and broadcaster extraordinaire, Hahn is renowned for making gardening accessible to everyone, especially building the confidence of inexperienced gardeners to just give it a go. Her radio work, listening and responding to questions, gives her a deep understanding of the problems gardeners face and what concerns them most. Which brings us to this book, filled with the same exuberant and fun approach, it covers all the basics of organic gardening and the crops to grow, with a focus on biodiversity and sustainable practices (although it concentrates on organic methods, it does include chemical options). Chapters include soil, vegies and herbs, fruits and nuts, natives, pests and diseases.

Steve Payne

SECRETS FROM THE FLOWER FARM

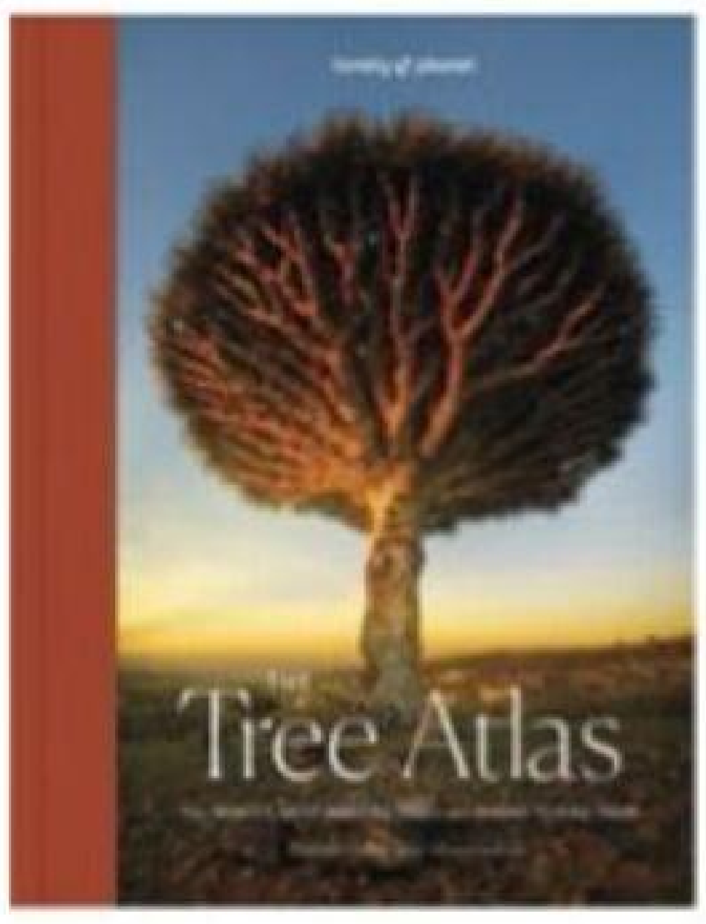
Rebecca Starling and Christine McCabe

THAMES & HUDSON AUSTRALIA, 2024

Drawing on Rebecca Starling's work as a cut flower farmer and floral designer in South Australia, this beautifully designed book is a practical guide to growing and arranging cut flowers. The book is split into four parts, the first offering practical steps for growing cut flowers. The remaining sections lean toward floral arranging and design principles, offering plenty of practical considerations across colour, shape, working with dried flowers and utilising foliage. There is an overall emphasis on working with your local environment, with one part dedicated entirely to growing and arranging Australian natives.

The book will be great for home gardeners looking to learn more about floral design and creating their own flower garden.

Eliza Henry-Jones



THE TREE ATLAS

Matthew Collins with Thomas Rutter

LONELY PLANET, 2024

The latest in the Lonely Planet 'Where to go in 2025' gift guide series is a stunner, looking at 50 of the world's more than 60,000 tree species from the magnificent to the quirky – and how you can visit them. For example, one of the endangered giant sequoias, with an average height between 49m–85m and an astonishing lifespan of 3000 years or so, has the prize as the largest tree on the planet. Alas, it grows only in a small strip of the Sierra Nevada mountains in central California and has been impacted badly by increasing wildfires. This beautifully presented and researched book was compiled by leading arboreal expert, Matthew Collins (head gardener at London's Garden Museum), and UK garden writer Thomas Rutter. Each tree profile includes stunning photos, vital details of its location, status and how to see it. Australian entries include the mountain ash and snow gum.

Steve Payne

HYDRANGEA

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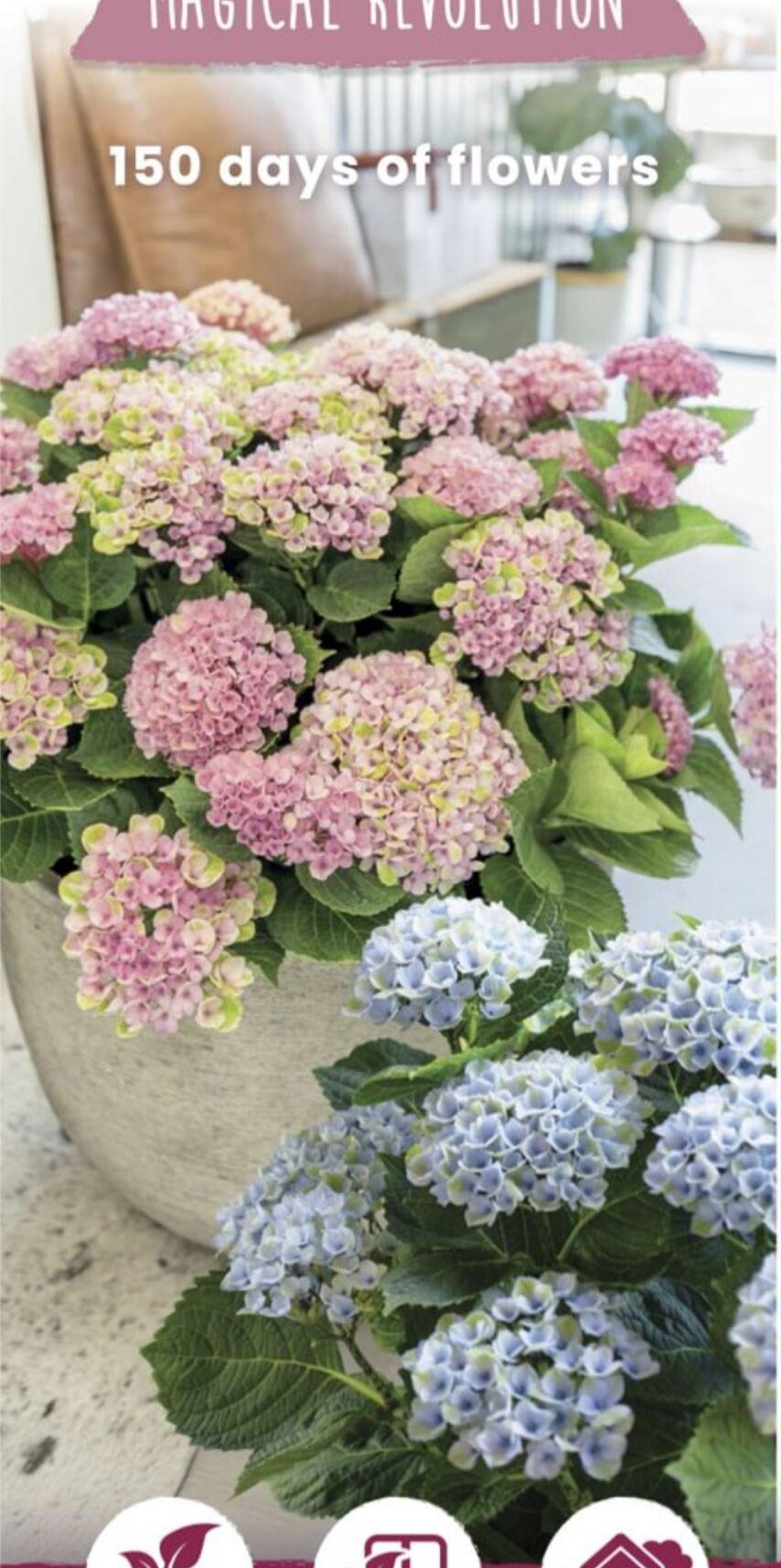
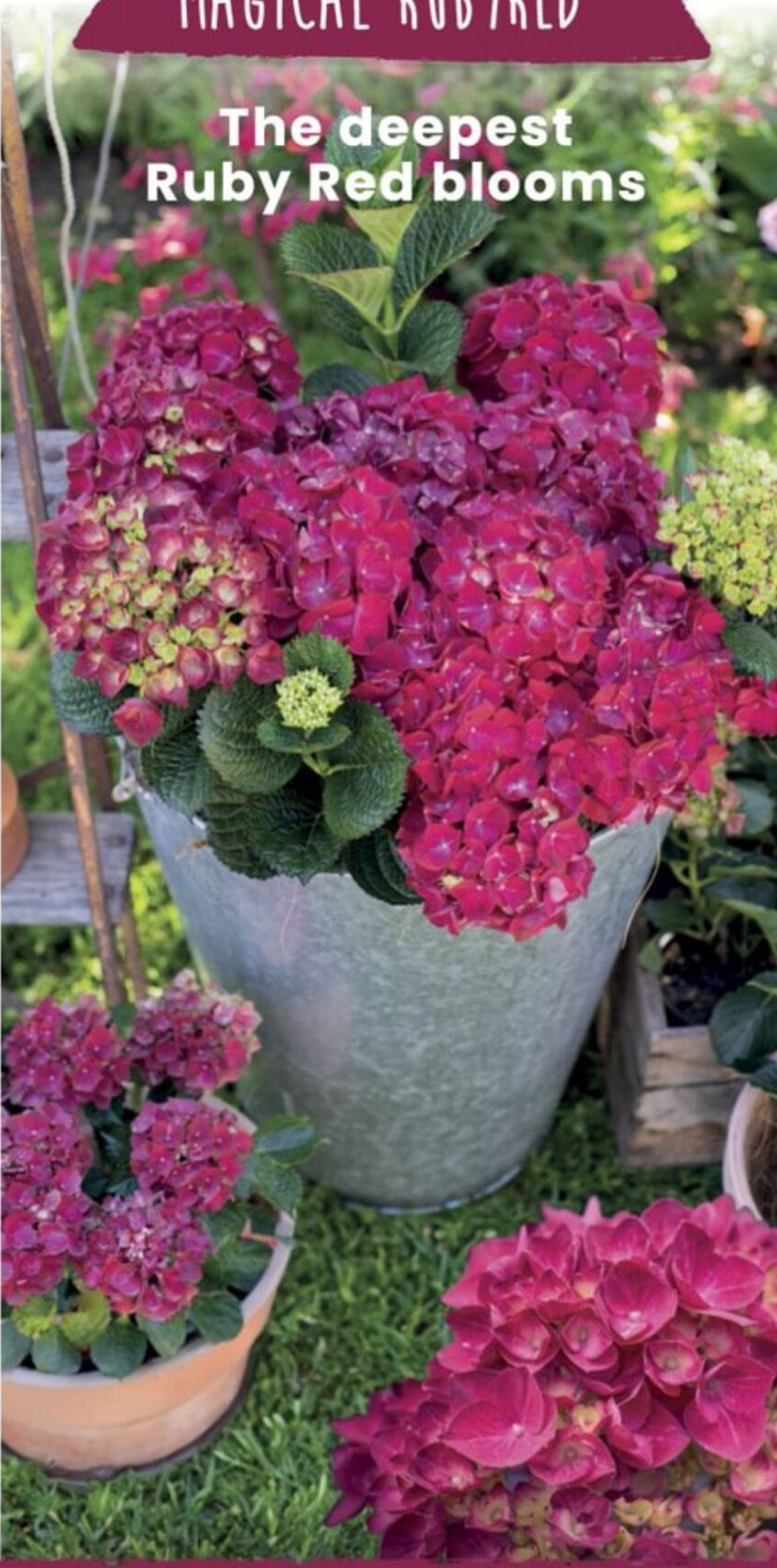


150 days of flowers

HYDRANGEA

MAGICAL RUBYRED



The deepest Ruby Red blooms

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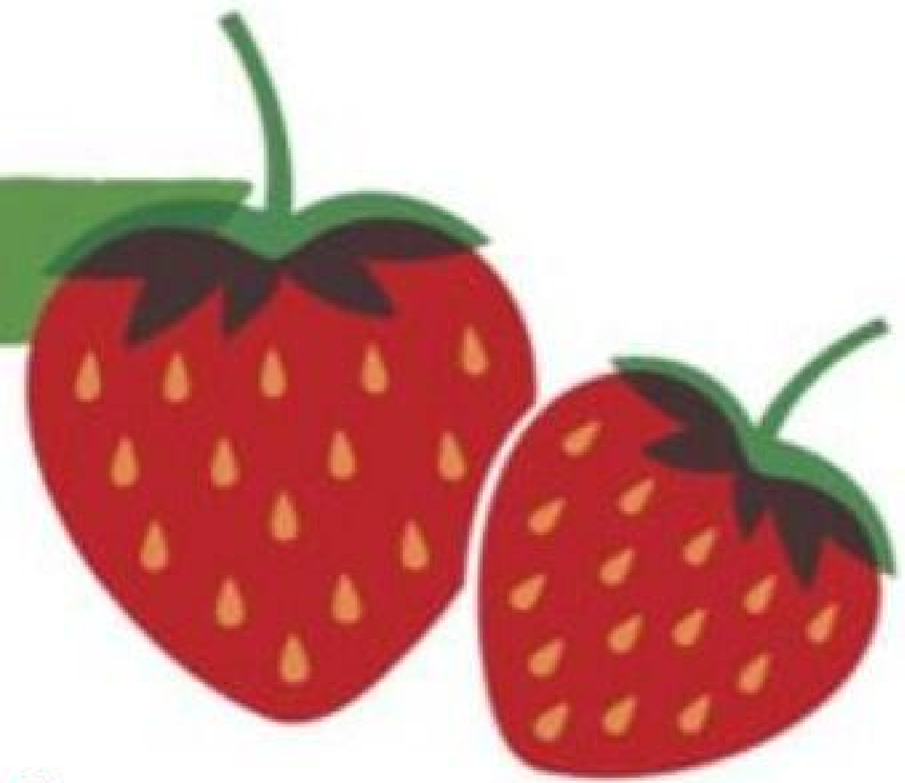
PMA

Get ready for summer in your garden.



Compact gardening

The Composta is an all-in-one gardening system that uses composting worms to transform your food scraps into nutrient-rich plant food, naturally nourishing the plants in the surrounding pot. Suitable for balconies, its easy-to-use design is an eco-friendly way to feed your herbs – you can even use the run-off from watering for other plants in your garden. **Visit: composta.myshopify.com; $114.95.**

Watering made easy

These adjustable water spikes from The Diggers Club will help ensure your plants stay hydrated, whether in pots or a garden. The spikes allow you to control the water flow rate, so no plant suffers from thirst during hot weather, even if you're away. Each pack contains three spikes that fit snugly onto a 1.25L glass or plastic bottle, making plant care easy and stress-free. **Visit: diggers.com.au; $13.**

Seasol
THE SEAWEED SOLUTION
POTS & PLANTS
SOIL SPRAY FOR PLANT HEALTH
Improves plant health & root development
Enhances flowering & fruiting
1.25 Litres

Boost pot plant health

Introducing Seasol Pots & Plants 1.25L trigger spray – a handy, ready-to-use spray pack with all the benefits of Seasol in a convenient bottle. The well-known seaweed solution will help your plants combat the stresses of pot life, such as heat, pests and low light. Just give your potting mix a spritz every two weeks, and enjoy vibrant foliage and flowers. **Available at Bunnings.**

Stylish pot plants

Elevate your plants using a pot from the Elho Vibes collection, designed to create an organic look with gentle curves and soft colours. Available in various sizes and pastel hues, you can mix and match to suit your plant and the interior colours of your home. Crafted from high-quality recycled plastic and produced using wind energy, the pots are both durable and eco-friendly. Your plant will feel right at home. **Available at Bunnings; $25.**

ILLUSTRATIONS: ISTOCK

Growing up

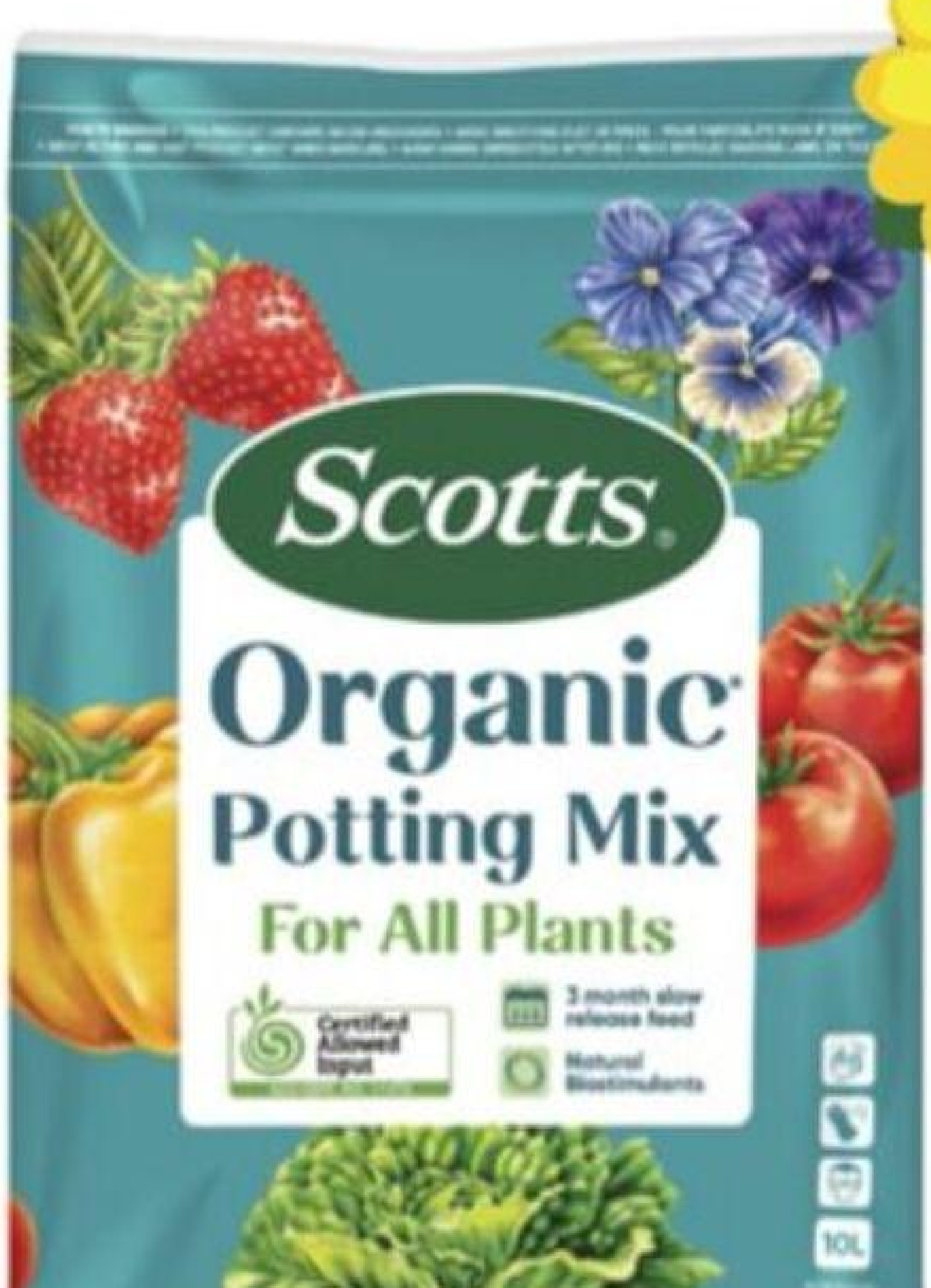
Looking for an easy way to support climbing plants in your garden? The Geo Pyramid Obelisk from Australian-owned company Jack offers durable support for climbing plants such as sweet peas, ensuring they grow happily. Simple to set up you can position it against walls or back-to-back for versatile garden arrangements. Whether you're looking to add vertical interest or support for your favourite blooms, these will help your plants climb high. **For stockists, visit: meetjack.com.au; $139.**

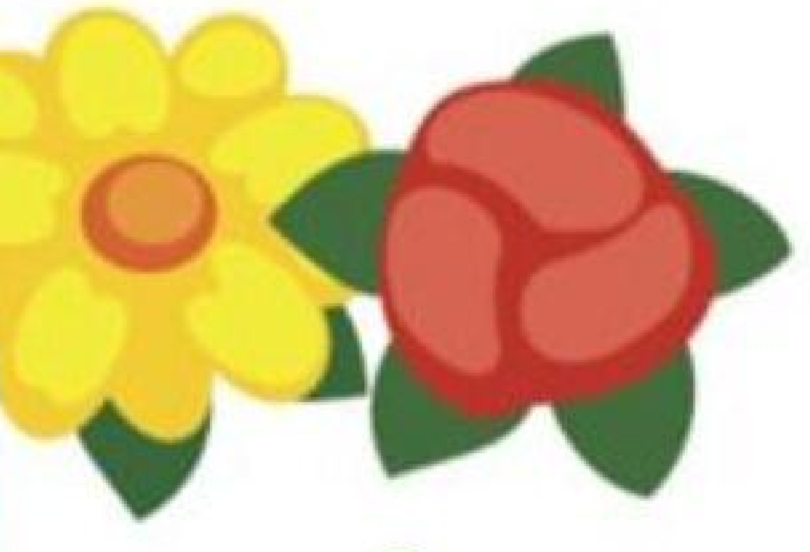
Tools for little gardeners

The little green thumbs in your life will enjoy gardening with these cool tools. The kids combo pack from Gardening On Country features a trowel and fork, which are 21cm long (30 per cent smaller than an adult's). Lightweight yet tough, they have ergonomic grips so small hands are comfortable. Best of all, each tool repurposes 25 bottle caps, making the set an eco-friendly choice. **Visit: gardeningoncountry.com.au; $22.**

Eco-friendly mix

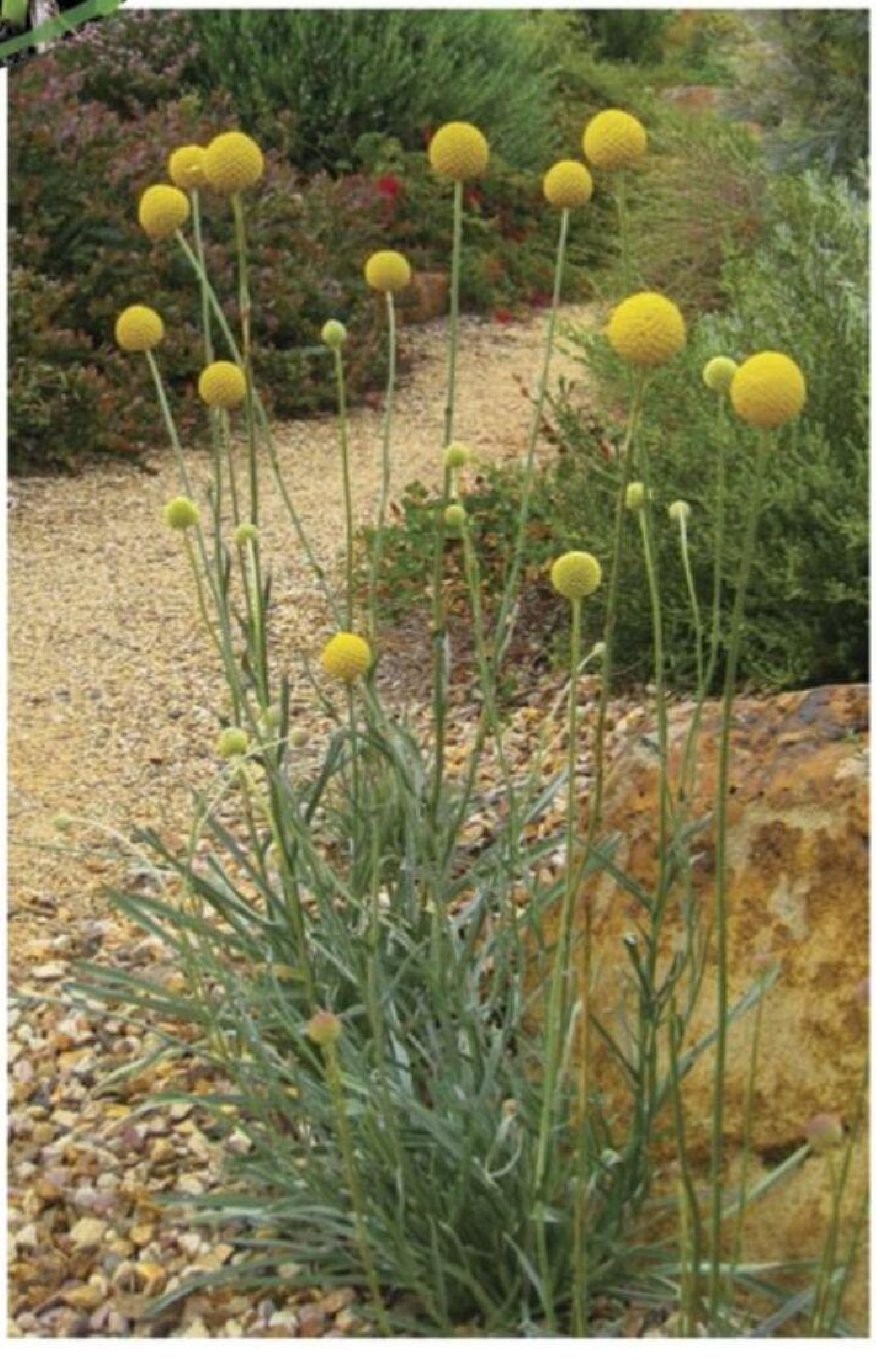
This eco-friendly formula from Scotts new range of certified organic gardening products is easy to use and safe for children and pets, making it a perfect choice for any garden. Packed with essential nutrients, it enriches the soil, boosts beneficial microbes, and promotes stronger plant growth and healthier foliage. Made with natural ingredients such as organic plant fertilisers, fish, humic acid, and seaweed. **The full organic range is available at Bunnings.**





Summer colour

Angus Stewart, familiar from his days on ABC *Gardening Australia*, loves native plants. One of his favourites for Aussie gardens is the billy buttons, a charming perennial with golden flowers. While drought-tolerant, they thrive best in moist, well-drained soil with plenty of sunlight to partial shade. The blooms flourish from spring to summer, attracting bees and butterflies. **Visit: gardeningwithangus.com.au, $7.95 (approximately 70 seeds).**



- ● TROPICAL
- ● SUBTROPICAL
- ● ARID/SEMI-ARID
- ● WARM TEMPERATE
- ● COLD TEMPERATE

For the insects!

By summer's zenith, gardens can look lacklustre, and beneficial insects can have trouble finding flowers that haven't succumbed to the heat. To keep your garden colourful and your insect friends happy, **Karen Sutherland** suggests these hardy, heat-tolerant plants from the daisy family to plant now in sunny spots.

Coneflower *Rudbeckia* spp. ● ● ● ●

The genus *Rudbeckia* was named by botanist Carl Linnaeus to honour his friend and fellow scientist Olof Rudbeck. Plants available in Australia can be annual, biennials or herbaceous perennials, which die to ground level after flowering, reshooting the following spring. Plants tolerate a variety of soil types but need good drainage and moisture. Summer-autumn blooms are usually yellow or orange, with a black centre, attracting butterflies and bees, and make lovely cut flowers. Rudbeckias can be affected by caterpillars. Pick off by hand or treat safely with the bacterial insecticide *Bacillus thuringiensis*. Some great choices include: *Rudbeckia fulgida* 'Goldsturm' – a perennial to 1m high; *R. hirta* cultivars 'Prairie Sun' and 'Indian Summer' – biennials to 1m high; and *R. hirta* 'Sahara' – a short-lived perennial that is commonly grown as an annual and produces flowers in autumnal shades of dusty pink, coppery brown and yellow on stems 40–60cm high.

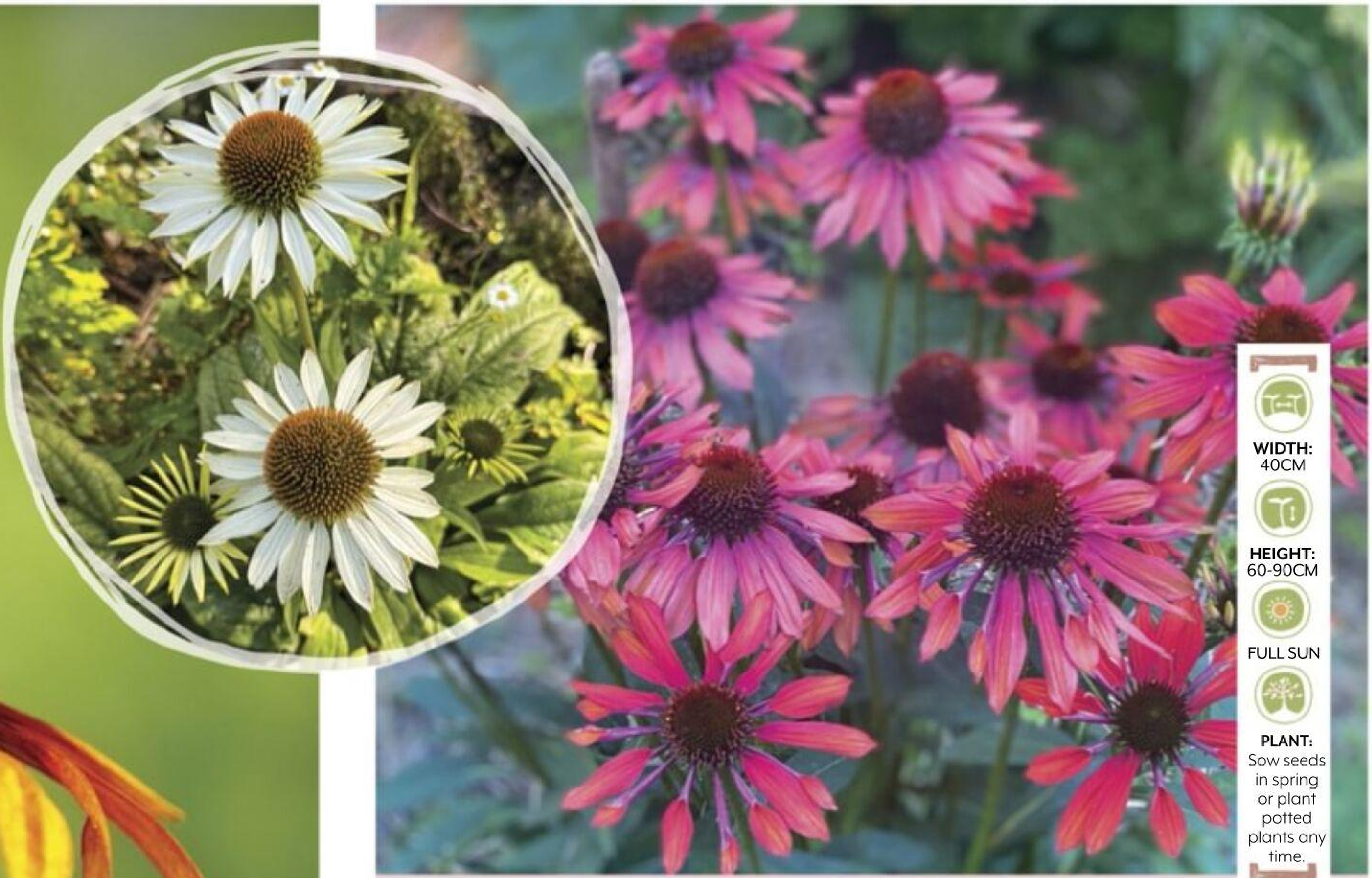
WIDTH:
30–60CM

HEIGHT:
40CM-1M

FULL SUN

PLANT:
Sow seeds in spring or plant seedlings spring/ summer.

PHOTO: ISTOCK



WIDTH: 40CM

HEIGHT: 60-90CM

FULL SUN

PLANT: Sow seeds in spring or plant potted plants any time.

Coneflower

Echinacea spp.

Echinaceas are often known more for their medicinal qualities than their beautiful flowers. Not to be confused with the other coneflowers, echinacea blooms look similar to rudbeckias but are a different genus. They are herbaceous perennials that are tolerant of a wide variety of soil types as long as they are well drained and kept moist. Long flowering, they make worthy inclusions in a flower border or cottage garden and make lovely cut flowers. Traditional choices are purple flowering *Echinacea purpurea* and the darker purple cultivar 'Magnus Superior', or white flowering 'White Swan'. For more vibrant colours, look for the recently released Artisan collection of cultivars in orange, yellow and soft reds, or the bright pink flowers of 'PowWow Wild Berry'. *E. pallida* features long, thin, pale-pink petals hanging from the central cone, and although appearing delicate, is more drought hardy than *E. purpurea*.

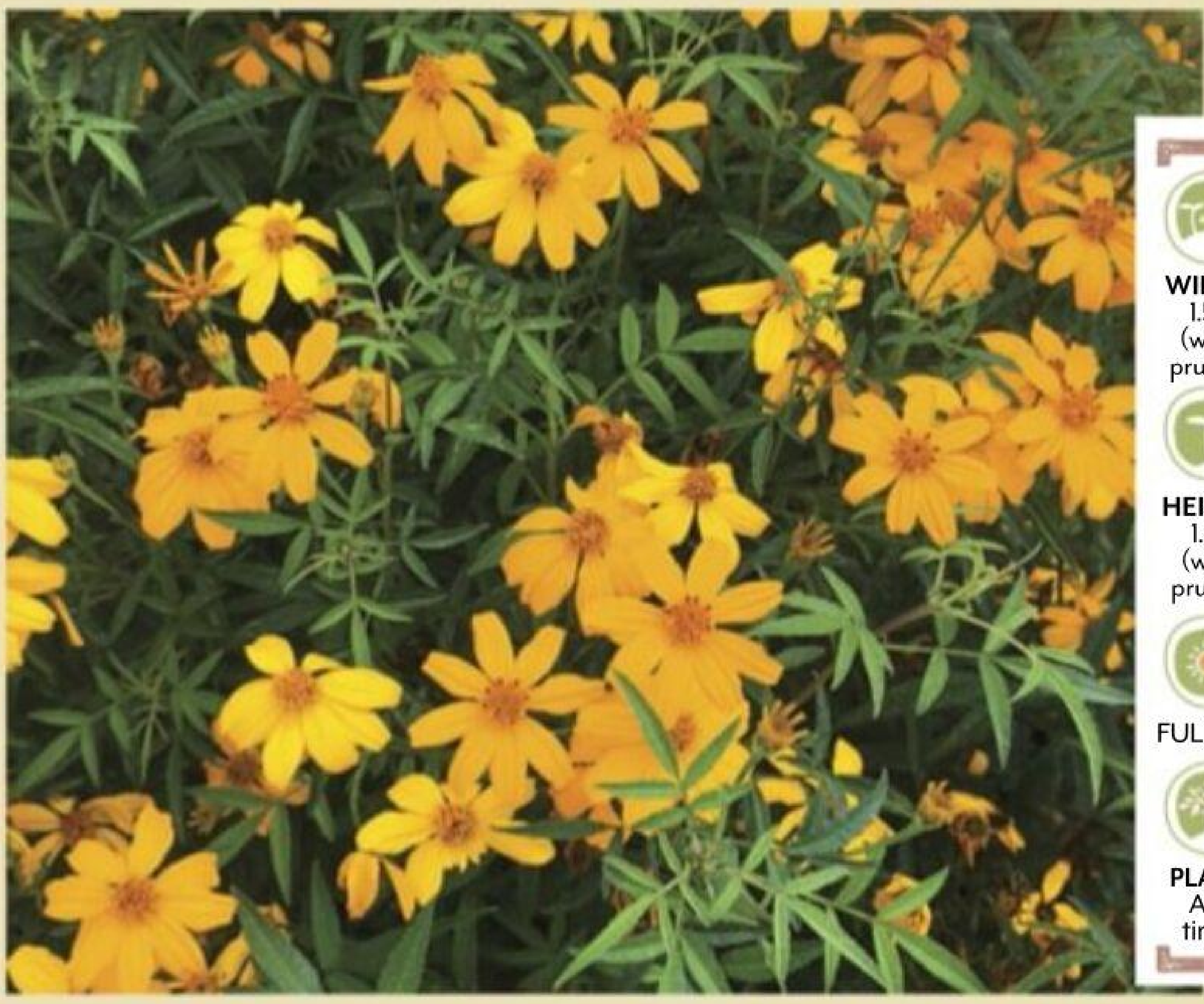


PHOTO: KAREN SUTHERLAND

WIDTH: 1.5M (when pruned)

HEIGHT: 1.5M (when pruned)

FULL SUN

PLANT: Any time.

Tree marigold

Tagetes lemmonii

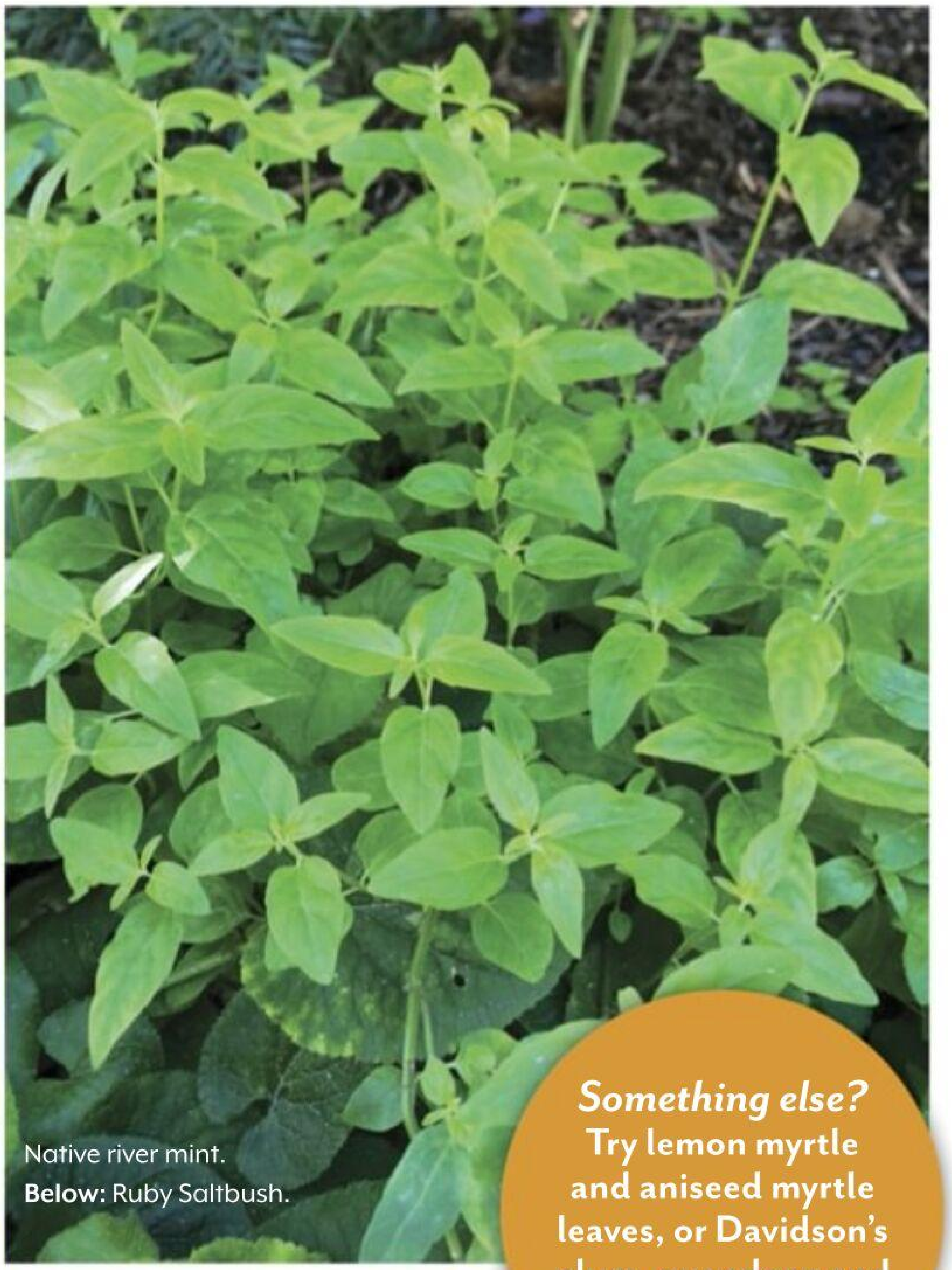
This hardy, quick-growing shrub is loved for its showy yellow flowers and distinctive scent, which is similar to passionfruit. Plants can reach over 2m high and wide but are best kept smaller with pruning. Cut back by one third after flowering to keep bushy and more compact. This marigold is drought-tolerant once established and copes with mild frosts. Plants are not fussy about soil type as long as they're well-drained. The strongly scented foliage can be lovely in a sensory garden or school garden – but some people find it a little too strong. Like some other *Tagetes*, this plant can help suppress soil nematodes. Plant them densely as a cover crop a few months before planting your susceptible crop.

The citrusy flavour of finger limes adds a refreshing taste to drinks.

Care for a cordial?

On sun-drenched days or sweltering nights, we tend to reach for cool, flavourful drinks to rehydrate and refresh. This summer, why not use Australian native leaves and fruits for a chilled drink with a difference? Here are three of **Karen Sutherland's** favourites that are easily grown so you can make your own.

PHOTO: ISTOCK



Native river mint.
Below: Ruby Saltbush.

PHOTOS: KAREN SUTHERLAND

Something else? **Try lemon myrtle and aniseed myrtle leaves, or Davidson's plum, quandong and lilly pilly fruits.**

Native river mint *Mentha australis*

This is native to eastern and southern Australia, occurring in every state and territory except Western Australia. Depending on their origin, plants may vary in appearance and scent, from spearmint to chocolate. They are winter deciduous in cool climates and the fragile stems benefit from being cut back by half while leafless, ready to sprout in spring. Plants thrive in full sun and are reasonably drought-tolerant once established. Grow between shrubs, on verge gardens or in pots. Powdery mildew can develop on leaves in the shade or in humid conditions. Remove affected leaves and prevent outbreaks with milk spray (1 part milk to 9 parts water). Use fresh or dried leaves to make tea or cold drinks just by dropping it into your liquid. Even a tiny sprig of fresh leaves can flavour a cocktail or mocktail.

Ruby saltbush *Enchylaena tomentosa*

With good-sized berries (5–8mm diameter) that have a sweet, salty flavour burst, you can add to drinks for a real twist. It's native to many inland areas of mainland Australia, so look for local variants in your area. Forms range from prostrate plants with hot-pink fruits, to small 60cm bushes with yellow, orange and red fruits. Ruby saltbush needs full sun, is drought-tolerant once established and doesn't like being overwatered, so is perfect for pots and drier garden zones. Fruits are ripe when red or pink. They are easily picked and so attractive to small birds and lizards. Crush and soak a heaped teaspoon of berries, pour over 2 cups boiling water and drink hot, or leave to cool and add ice. Fruits can also be used to flavour kombucha.

Finger limes *Citrus australasica*

Among the better known edible native fruits, finger limes are native to rainforests of northern New South Wales and south-east Queensland, but can be grown all over Australia when protected from extreme cold. Plants need well-drained soil, grow in pots and thrive in full sun and dappled light. Feed regularly with citrus food and keep soil moist to promote fruiting. There are over 40 cultivars available, with a range of skin and flesh colours, including yellow, red, orange and green. Slices of fruits, fresh or dried, look and taste great floated in drinks. Crush the tiny vesicles, which can look like caviar, to release juices and add a dash to a jug of water or a cocktail, or use to make cordial.

Where to find them

- Look for local specialist native plant nurseries, although also available at some general nurseries and garden centres.
- Look online for suppliers of native edible plants and seeds.

Glass Gem makes great corn flour and popcorn as well as being ornamental.

> Plant only one variety at a time as cross-pollination can impact the taste and texture of your cobs.

The heat lovers

From amaranth to corn, there are plenty of vegies that do well in the heat of summer, while providing abundant food, shade and colour, writes **Jian Liu**.

The peak of summer can be a challenging time in the vegie patch, with soaring temperatures exacerbated by arid conditions or high humidity, depending on your climate. Over the years in our patch, we've seen our fair share of successes and failures while trying to grow vegetables in the sweltering summers.

While some plants keel over in these conditions, the good news is there is a diverse range of heat-tolerant vegies that not only thrive under the Australian sun, but will provide you with an abundant harvest through summer.

These heat-loving plants can also perform a myriad of other functions in the garden; taller-growing plants such as corn or amaranth, for instance, provide much-needed protection to shade-loving plants; choko and New Guinea beans when trained on an arbour, create a cool sanctuary beneath their generous vines; chillies and snake beans will brighten up your vegie patch with their dazzling foliage, flowers and fruit.

Here's my list of tried and tested heat-loving vegies that will delight in your peak summer garden.

CORN

Nothing says summer more than tall stalks of corn swaying in the wind. True to its Mexican roots, corn adores the heat and can easily tolerate everything an Australian summer can throw at it. It flourishes under the scorching summer sun, while being tolerant of both drought and humidity.

Plant corn in your sunniest spot to soak up the heat, and position it next to cucumber, zucchini or lettuce that will appreciate the shade it casts.

Growing tips: Being a type of grass, corn is a voracious feeder and you will need to prepare your soil with well-rotted manure, compost and fertiliser. Top up with extra soil and compost during the growing season to provide support for lanky plants.

Since corn is wind pollinated, plant in blocks of at least 3 rows, or hand pollinate by removing the pollen filled tassels (male flowers) from the top of one of the plants and brushing them against the silks (the female flowers at the ends of the immature cobs or 'ears). Plant only one variety at a time as cross-pollination can impact the taste and texture of your cobs.

Varieties to try: There are countless varieties of corn, so don't limit yourself to the classic supermarket sweet corn (having said that, homegrown sweet corn tastes incredible). Our personal favourite is the waxy, glutinous corn varieties, which are savoury with an addictive texture. For a colourful twist, try Glass Gem with its assortment of white, pink, jade, yellow, purple orange and green kernels. It makes great popcorn, cornflour or ornamental display!

PHOTO: JIAN LIU

AMARANTH

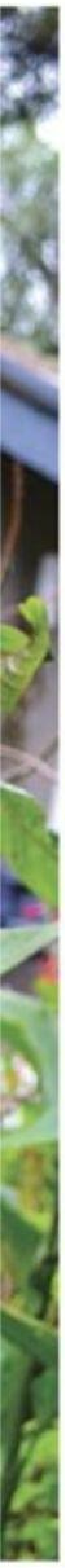
While it can be tricky growing leafy greens like spinach in summer, amaranth makes it a cinch. Amaranth is a heat-loving and drought-tolerant plant that's nutritious, easy to grow and highly ornamental. The colourful leaves in festive shades of red to green can be used in the place of spinach in dishes. If left to flower, amaranth produces unique blooms that can be harvested as a cut flower or as amaranth grain at the end of the season – a high-protein 'superfood' that's often used in breakfast porridge.

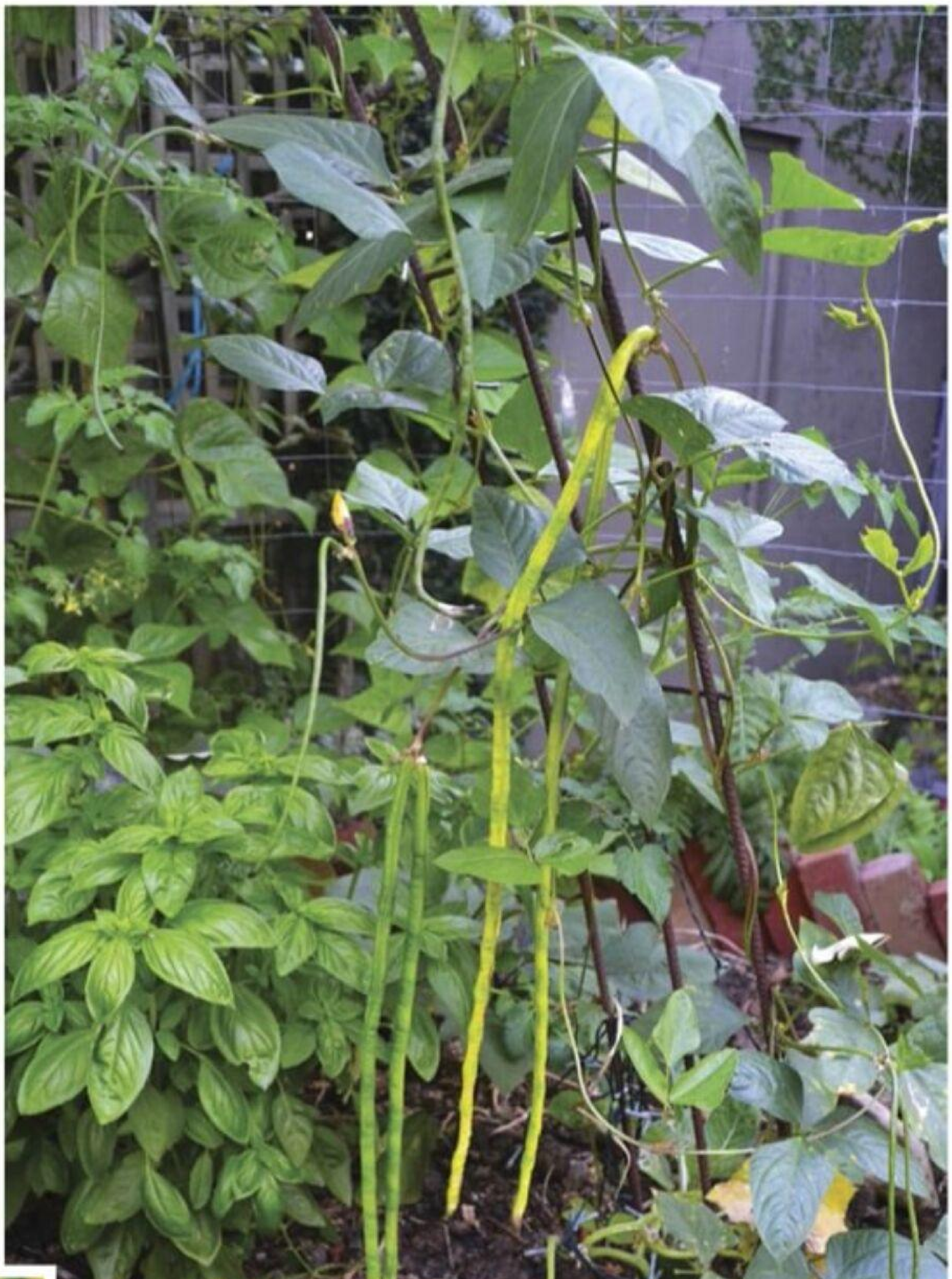
Growing tips: Amaranth grows in all soil types but does prefer it to be compost-rich with good drainage. Plant in full sun and leave adequate space between plants (at least 60cm) to prevent fungal diseases, as plants are large when fully grown. Pinch growing tips to encourage branching and a bushier plant.

Varieties to try: Certain varieties of amaranth have been selected for their flowers and seed, while others for their leaves. If you're after grain, the most striking to grow is love-lies-bleeding (*Amaranthus caudatus*), which has long, trailing tassels of deep-red flowers. Amaranth green leaf (*A. tricolor*) produces large tender leaves that are tasty in stir-fries, soups and stews.

Above right: The colourful flower tassels of amaranth.
Above: The unique blooms can be used as a cut flower.

PHOTOS: JIAN LIU; TOP LEFT & ILLUSTRATION: ISTOCK





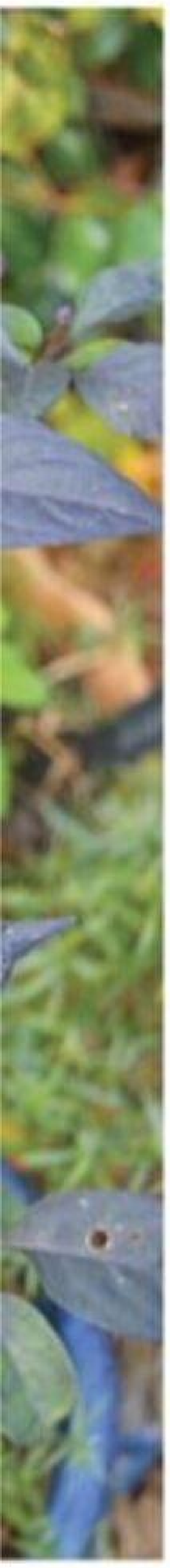
SNAKE BEANS

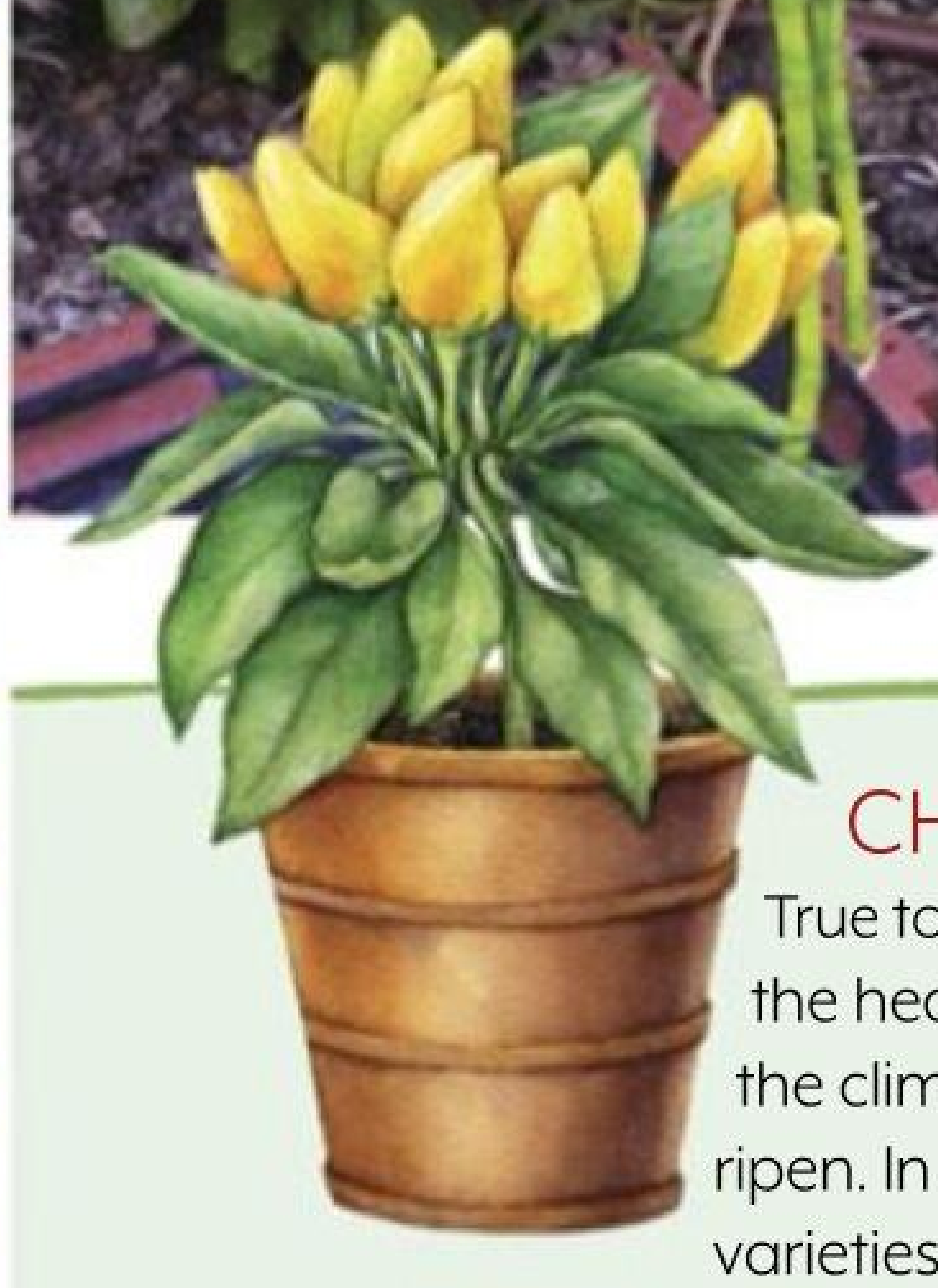
Also known as yardlong beans, snake beans are one of the most heat-tolerant varieties of bean. Being more resistant to fungal diseases, they flourish in hot and humid climates. Snake beans produce unusually long yet tender beans that grow up to 60cm in length, indeed resembling a snake. The flowers are stunning – white to lilac in colour and delicate as a butterfly. The beans have a firm, crisp texture and great flavour; they are particularly delicious in stir-fries, curries and South-East Asian dishes.

Growing tips: Like all beans, snake beans are best planted from seed directly into the garden bed as they don't like being transplanted (if you prefer punnets, start them in multicell cotainers to minimise root disturbance). Grow in full sun in a soil enriched with compost and well-rotted manure. Regular harvesting will encourage more beans to be produced.

Varieties to try: The two main types of snake beans are climbing or bush/dwarf. Climbing varieties will need an arch or trellis to climb, while bush varieties will only need a short stake for support.

While the dwarf varieties are more compact, I find the climbing beans give a greater and more continual harvest all summer, and produce longer, more impressive beans. Within those categories, there are both red and green varieties; the red being particularly striking in the garden, with the long, burgundy beans contrasting against lush, green leaves.





CHILLIES

True to their fiery flavour, chillies thrive in the heat of summer. In fact, the warmer the climate, the quicker your chillies will ripen. In Australia, we tend to call the spicy varieties 'chillies' and the mild varieties 'capsicum'. Chillies are wonderful compact growers and are ideally suited to growing in pots, adding bright pops of colour across the garden.

Growing tips: Chillies are not fussy, but do require good drainage, so it's wise to plant into pots using good-quality potting mix, enriched with compost. Don't overfeed with nitrogen-rich fertilisers or you'll end up with abundant leafy growth at the expense of fruit.

Chillies are in fact short-lived perennials, which means they can thrive for a number of seasons. Overwinter your chillies by moving your pots to a warm, sheltered spot when the weather cools. Second year plants will give you a much earlier harvest.

Varieties to try: Coming in all colours of the rainbow, there's a variety of chilli for every occasion and taste. Our favourite mild chillies are jalapeño, Bishop's Crown (a whimsical hat-shaped chilli) and Blue Christmas (a variety with deep-purple foliage and fruit resembling strings of colourful Christmas lights). Our top hot chillies are the White Chupetinho (a pure white chilli in the shape of a teardrop) and the classic habanero. For shadier gardens, try the true perennial Manzano and Rocoto varieties.

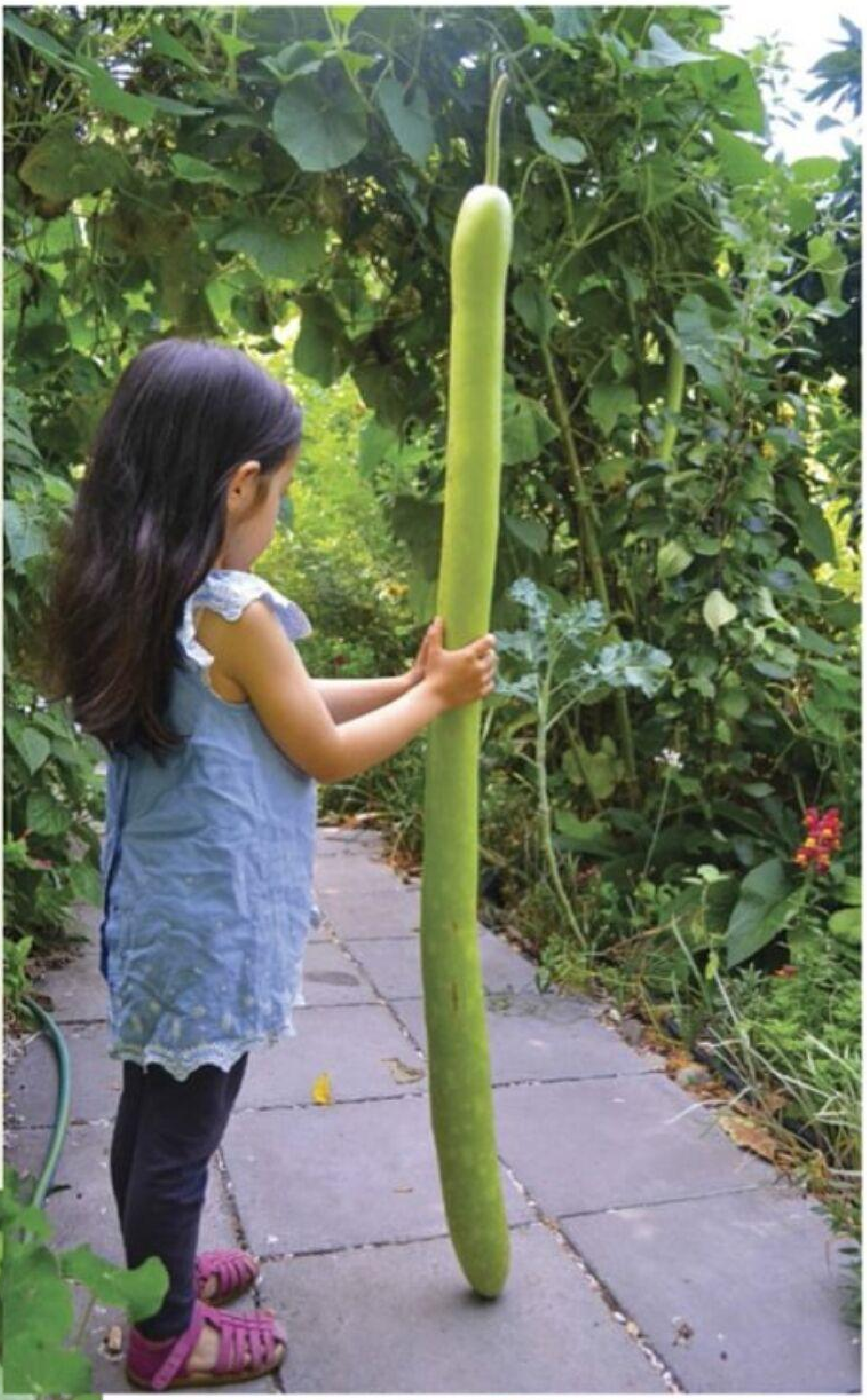
Far left: The many varieties of chilli thrive in the summer heat.
Left: Blue Christmas is a mild-flavoured chilli variety.

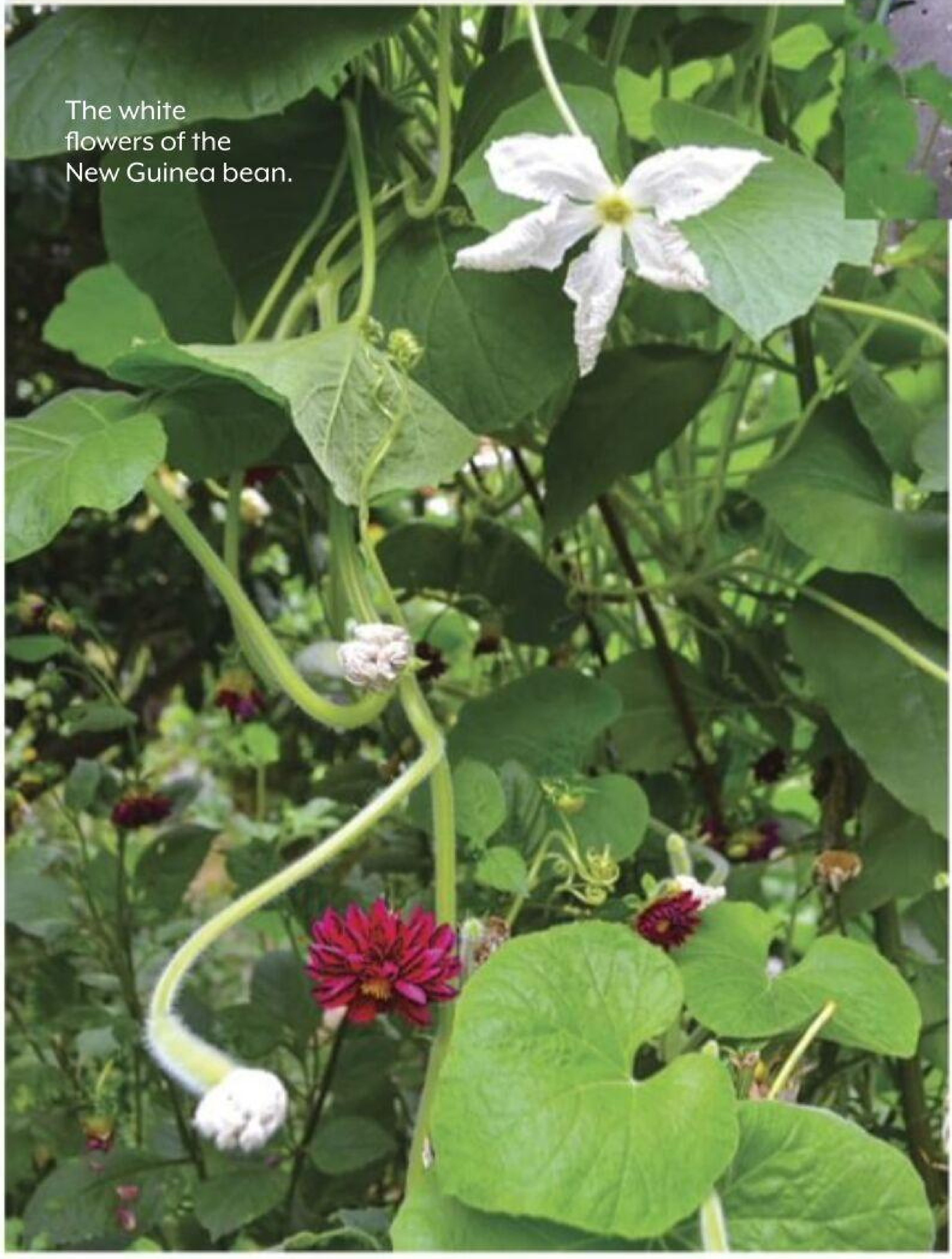
NEW GUINEA BEAN

Neither a bean nor from New Guinea, this interesting gourd is one of the best-tasting vegies we grow. Known affectionately as cucuzza in Italy or bottle gourd in Asia, New Guinea Beans love the heat and vines are adorned in floaty, white flowers all summer. Less bothered by fungal diseases, they are ideal for those who struggle to grow cucurbits or beans in the tropics. Fruit has a sweet to neutral flavour with a delicate texture, that in our opinion, is superior to zucchini. Harvest when fruit is around 30cm long or leave to grow into a truly giant fruit that is quite the spectacle in the garden.

Growing tips: Plant in full sun. The vines are vigorous growers and will need a durable and large trellis or arch on which to clamber. Amend heavy soils with plenty of organic matter and well-aged manure to improve drainage and add nutrition. Plants are reasonably drought-tolerant but do appreciate a deep watering once a week. Bees are required for pollination, or hand-pollinate to improve fruit set.

Varieties to try: I'm only aware of the one variety of New Guinea Bean with light-green fruit – it's both delicious and ornamental and well worth growing.





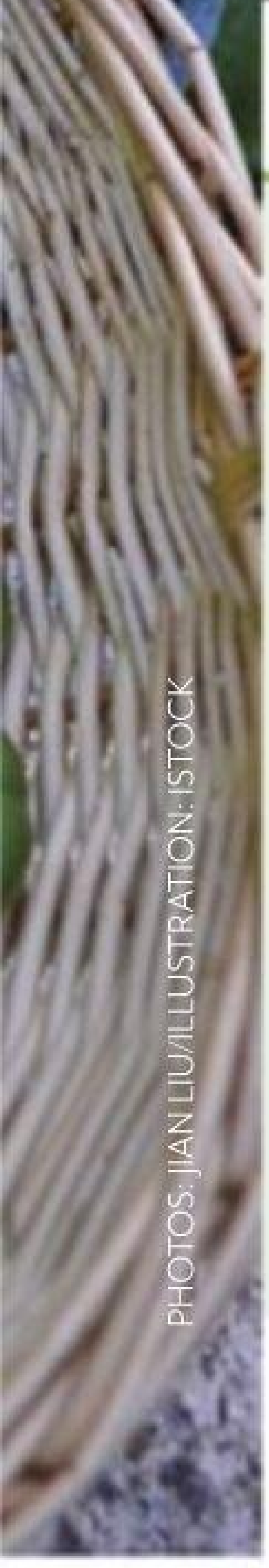
The white flowers of the New Guinea bean.

CHOKO

Chokos, also known as chayote, are a climbing, rambling vine that produces an abundant amount of mild-tasting, zucchini-like vegetables. Once scorned but now coming back into fashion, chokos are prolific, with one vine producing enough fruit to feed your street (and possibly the next one!). All parts of the plant are edible: use the knobbly, pear-shaped fruits wherever you'd use zucchini, while the tender shoots of the vine are fantastic in stir-fries. When trained over a pergola, the vines provide refreshing shade, making it one of those wonderful multipurpose plants.

Growing tips: For the best fruit production, plant vines in full sun, on a tall trellis or arbour, or trained up a tree. Vines are vigorous and will need regular pinching of growing tips, which can then be used for cooking. They will bear fruit in summer in hot climates but generally not until autumn in cooler areas. Good drainage is important, and while plants can grow in poor soil, the addition of some compost to the soil will greatly increase productivity. They are perennial in most climates and can live for several years. In cool areas, mulch heavily over winter to protect their roots.

Varieties to try: In our food forest, we grow what we affectionately call the 'green' choko and the 'white' choko. The green is the more common variety. Both taste similar, although the white is a bit more tender and delicately flavoured, and easier to harvest, as the fruit is easy to spot against the emerald-green leaves of the vine. Pick fruit young for a more tender skin and texture. When steamed, the white variety looks a lot like mashed potato!

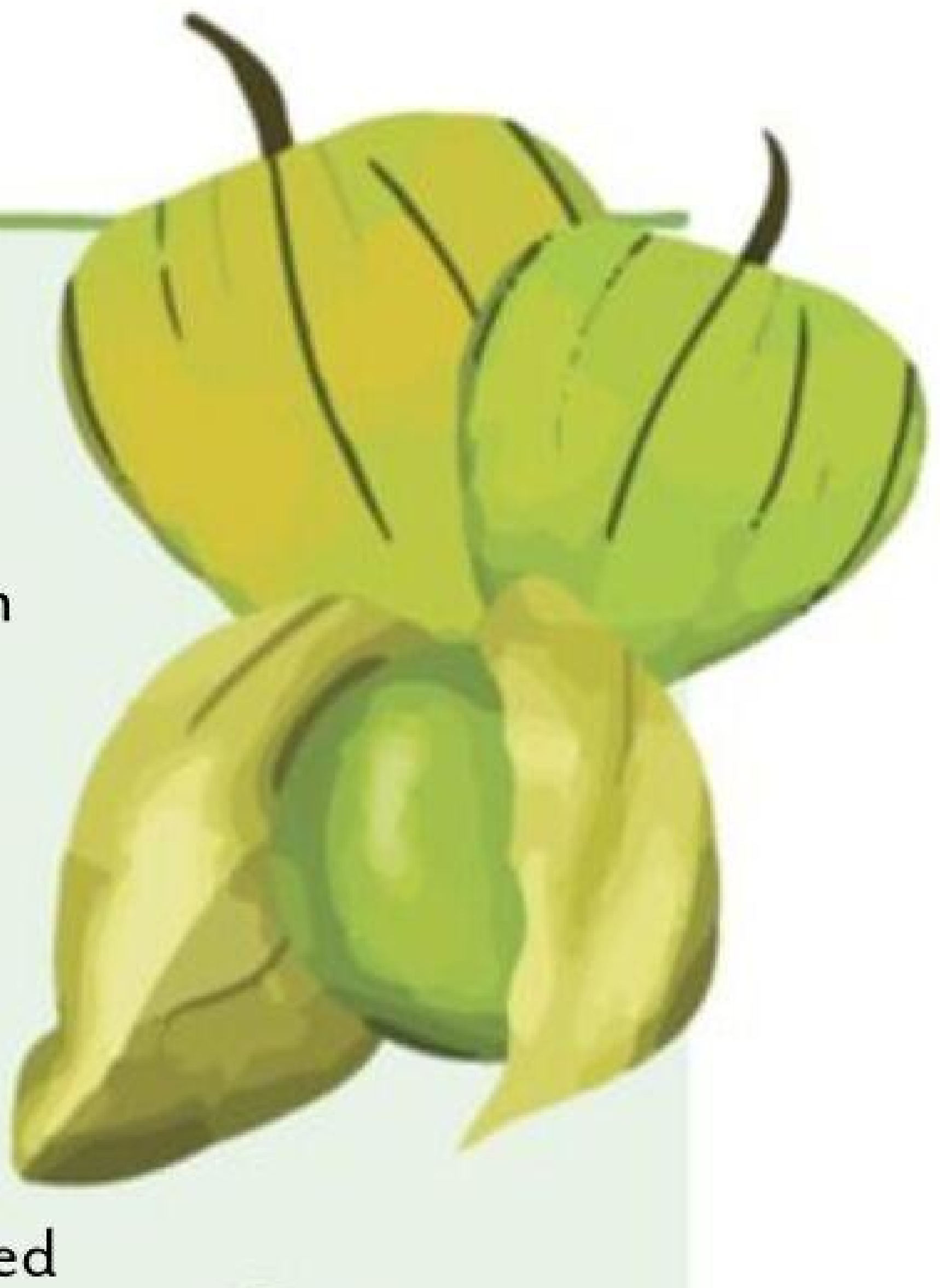


TOMATILLO

Tomatillos are closely related to tomatoes, but are not as widely known or grown outside their native home of Mexico and Central America. They are also called husk tomatoes but tolerate hotter conditions and are more disease resistant than tomatoes. The unique fruit comes with its own protective wrapper and grows inside a lantern-like husk. They are a key ingredient in salsa verde and a staple in Mexican cuisine, adding a tangy kick to sauces and salsas.

Growing tips: Plant in full sun or part-shade. They enjoy rich well-draining soil high in organic matter. Plants are much shorter and bushier than tomatoes and do well grown inside a tomato cage, which helps to support their wide branches typically heaving with fruit in late summer. Harvest when the husk turns papery and brown, and the fruit fills out the husk.

Varieties to try: Tomatillos come in three colours: green, purple and yellow. The green variety is the most tart and ideal for sauces, while the purple and yellow are sweeter and better suited to being eaten raw or cooked into a sauce.



PHOTOS: JIAN LIU/ILLUSTRATION: ISTOCK

The flesh is textured like kiwifruit and can be blended to make an exotic drink.

PHOTOS: ISTOCK/TOP LEFT: PHIL DUDMAN

A ROARING SUCCESS

Connie Cao explains how to grow your own delicious dragon fruit, even in cooler climates, and maximise flavour.

If you're a tropical fruit lover, a homegrown dragon fruit is a must for your patch, and it's possible even for those in warm temperate climates. The subtly sweet flavour is a favourite of mine – often described as like a pear with the texture of kiwifruit with its little black seeds. I seek these plants out wherever I can.

Dragon fruit (also known as pitaya) is a perennial native to Mexico and Central and South America. A fruiting cactus, its grown in many Southeast Asian and tropical regions.

Happy plants will live for up to 10–20 years and you can easily create numerous new plants through cuttings or pruning off cuts.

Above: The flesh can be red, white or yellow.
Top left: Dragon fruit flowers open for just one day, usually in the evening and into the following morning.
Left: Plants produce multiple fruiting stems.

If you've had dragon fruit that was 'bland' or 'tasteless', I'll wager they were commercially grown and picked too early – before they've fully sweetened.

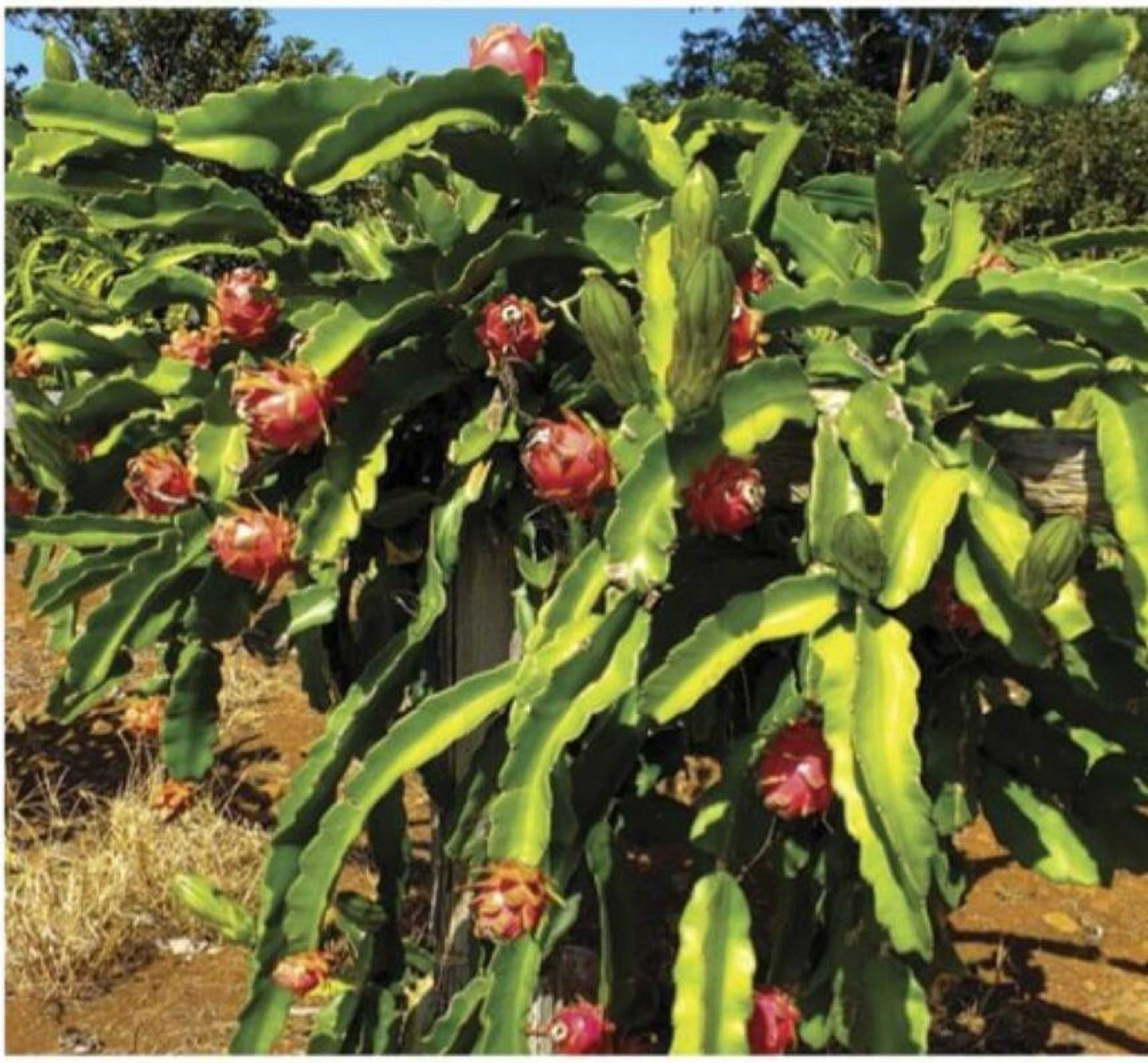
Grow one in the garden – for a fresh, homegrown dragon fruit picked at the right time is a delight to the senses. You'll also get to enjoy the flowers, which truly are a sight to witness – large, extravagant and fragrant, blooming only in the evening for a short time.

Varieties

In Australia, you'll find some nurseries stock varieties labelled only by the colour of its flesh – red, white or yellow – whereas others will stock named varieties.

Where possible, I'd highly recommend a named variety so you're able to look up its specific features and pollination requirements.

Fruit is ready to pick when they've reached their final colour. **Below:** Provide a solid support frame for the heavy fleshy stems.



Dragon fruit varieties can be divided into three categories:

- Red skin, white flesh is the most common type. e.g., Vietnam White.
- Red skin, red flesh; e.g., Sugar Dragon.
- Yellow skin, white flesh; e.g., Yellow Megalanthus.

Each variety differs in fruit size, taste, plant vigour and pollination requirements. As a general rule, smaller varieties are sweeter than larger varieties; and yellow flesh varieties are the sweetest, but the fruits themselves have thorns (these can be brushed off when harvesting, but wear gloves when handling).

Climate and location

The ideal climate for a dragon fruit is the tropics or subtropics, where plants can flower and fruit many times throughout a season. However, temperate climate gardeners like me can still grow dragon fruit and I've seen many a plant live happily in Melbourne. The key is to create a warm microclimate to protect it through cooler temperatures in winter, such as draping some cloth over the plant or situating it against a warm, north-facing brick wall. While plants will survive light frosts, they don't like them.

Locate your dragon fruit plant in a sunny position as stems with direct sunlight are more likely to fruit. That said, ensure it is protected from any harsh afternoon sun as temperatures in their high 30s can burn the plant and fruit.

Starting out

The most efficient way to get started with growing dragon fruit is by a cutting – either from a nursery or someone with an existing plant. Allow the end of the cutting to dry and scab over before planting. You'll need hardy gloves or a wad of newspaper to navigate its spines.

Starting with a cutting will see you getting fruit within 1–2 years, whereas starting by seed may take 4–7 years to get fruit.

Providing support

Mature dragon fruit plants form the shape of a weeping cherry when trained well. Hence, it's important to ensure you have a trellis system ready to go to support its heavy, fleshy stems.

One type of structure that's popular is made by securing a strong, central wooden post 50cm deep in the ground with a solid crosspiece bolted to the top, 1.2–1.5m above ground to support the heavy branches. Simply plant 1–2 plants at the base of the central stake and train a single stem to the top of the frame gently securing it to the stake using cloth ties or grafting tape. Once plants reach the top, cut off the next segment to encourage branching and allow them to drape downwards over the cross piece.

Growing needs

Being a cactus, dragon fruit plants demand good drainage so mound your soil and incorporate coarse sand or gravel to improve drainage where necessary.

PHOTOS & ILLUSTRATION: ISTOCK. BELOW: PHIL DUDMAN.

Water infrequently but deeply, to mimic natural desert conditions of long, dry periods between rain. In cooler climates, dragon fruit plants will go dormant in winter. Hold back from watering during this time.

To support healthy growth, give them a little organic fertiliser in spring, summer and autumn. For pots, add a sprinkle of organic fertiliser once a month from spring to autumn.

Pruning

It's best to prune your plant after all the fruit has been harvested. First, remove dead, damaged and diseased stems. Next, remove criss-crossing stems, unwanted growth and any stems growing in the shade as these will less likely fruit.

In warmer climates, prune often and regularly and you'll be rewarded with multiple flushes of fruit throughout the season.

Pollination

Dragon fruit flowers only bloom for a day, usually in the evening. This short window of time is when pollination needs to occur. Some dragon fruit varieties are self-pollinating, others require a pollination partner.

If you find that not many of your flowers are turning into fruit, then it's best to hand-pollinate the flowers using an artist's brush. Take pollen from the male anthers (the fluffy bits that encircle the centre) and brush it onto the female stigma (in the middle of the flower). Once pollinated, flowers will close and fruit will start to grow.

Harvest time

Fruit is ready to pick around 5–6 weeks after pollination, when they have reached their final colour, are firm with a slight give and start to loosen from the plant. Harvest by making a small V-shaped cut using sharp secateurs, cutting as close to the fruit as possible to minimise damage to the plant. Picked fruits can be stored in the fridge for up to 2–4 weeks and taste best when chilled. To enjoy your freshly grown dragon fruit, simply cut in half and scoop out the flesh with a spoon. og

CONTAINER GROWING

For a small space, it's best to grow dragon fruit in a large 50cm diameter pot. You won't need a frame. Just sit the pot on top of some stacked concrete blocks, plant one cutting in the middle of the pot and let the stems hang over the edge of the pot. For container growing, use a 50:50 blend of cactus potting mix and premium potting mix.

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Going all-in on ORGANICS

PHOTO: ISTOCK

Whether you're just starting out or have years of experience, creating an eco-friendly garden is easier than ever, with a deepening knowledge of key organic gardening techniques and an expanding range of non-toxic products, writes **Phil Dudman**.

PHOTO: PHIL DUDMAN

For those drawn to organic gardening, it's more than a hobby; it's a lifestyle choice rooted in care for the planet and ourselves. When we grow organically, we're making a commitment to eliminate toxic chemicals and to minimise our environmental footprint by cultivating life in ways that honour nature's rhythms.

We nurture our soil with vitalising compost, manage pests and diseases using natural methods and save seeds from heirloom varieties we treasure. When we need some help, we're lucky to have access to an expanding range of certified organic products that support our gardens' organic rating.

We thought we'd set out all the basics of an organic garden, to not only help those starting out, but for those already on the organic journey to do an audit, of sorts, of how they are going and what new ideas and products are out there that might help further that journey.

Organic essentials

Committing to a chemical-free gardening approach has become easier with the variety of certified organic products available today. From nutrient-rich composts to gentle pest control solutions, each product category offers natural alternatives that can replace synthetic products. Look for logos on labels that indicate products are certified organic, but in cases where these options aren't available, naturally derived alternatives are the next best choice to keep our gardens healthy.

ORGANIC COMPOST AND SOIL AMENDMENTS

Building healthy soil with compost and other natural soil enhancers is the foundation of sustaining a productive organic garden. The impacts of non-organic gardening, farming in particular, have become more apparent as time goes on: nutrient-poor soils with much of the life removed, and relying on artificial fertilisers and chemicals to keep plants alive.

- **Organic compost made from decomposed organic materials, enriches soil with nutrients, improves moisture retention, and boosts soil structure for better aeration and root growth.**
- **Worm castings packed with plant-available nutrients and beneficial microbes, further enhance soil biology and water-holding capacity, making it perfect for adding to soil or potting mixes.**
- **Biochar (pictured below) is a carbon-rich additive that increases long-term water and nutrient retention while attracting beneficial microbes and fungi to enhance healthy soil biology and plant growth.**

Check out these products:

- Calder Permaculture Organic Liquid Worm Castings: calderpermaculture.com.au
- Richgro All Purpose Organic Compost: richgro.com.au
- Rocky Point Organic Compost: rockypoint.com.au
- Seasol Biochar with Zeolite: seasol.com.au
- Verasoil Organic Worm Castings: verasoil.com.au

ORGANIC MULCH

Not so long ago, if you couldn't source your own mulch, it was hard to find certified organic mulches at garden centres. Mulch, whether straw, sugar cane, lucerne, and shredded wood and bark chips, are now recognised for the multiple benefits they bring to garden soil and plants.

By covering the soil surface, mulch reduces moisture loss through evaporation, allowing plants to thrive for longer between watering and rain events. A cover of mulch also suppresses weeds naturally by burying weed seeds and blocking their access to sunlight, inhibiting their germination. Over time, organic mulch breaks down, adding a valuable source of organic matter that nourishes beneficial soil organisms and enhances soil structure.

Different mulches serve various purposes:

- Straw and sugar cane mulch are lightweight and decompose quickly, making them ideal for using on vegetable gardens that demand the greatest fertility.
- Nutrient rich lucerne increases nitrogen and potassium levels in the soil and is ideal for enriching poor soils and boosting fertility in the vegie patch.
- Shredded wood and bark chips are slower to breakdown and will provide longer lasting benefits and steady soil improvement around fruit trees and ornamentals.

Check out these products:

- Neutrog Whoflungdung: neutrog.com.au
- Rocky Point Organic Sugar Cane Mulch or Lucerne Mulch: rockypoint.com.au

PHOTO: ISTOCK

ORGANIC FERTILISERS

Organic fertilisers and plant tonics, such as animal manures, blood and bone, fish and seaweed extracts and rock minerals, provide essential nutrients for plants while helping to build a healthier soil profile over time. Once again, the range of products has expanded greatly in the last decade and become more specialised, with different mixes for different situations.

- Animal manures, such as cow, horse or chicken manure sold in natural, blended or pelletised forms, are a valuable source of nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium, boosting soil fertility and enhancing plant growth. Apply to vegies every 6–8 weeks or as product recommends.
- Blood and bone fertilisers sourced from cattle processing are available in powdered and pelletised forms and are rich in nitrogen, phosphorus and calcium, promoting strong root systems and lush foliage. Some products are fortified with sulfate of potash to give plants a boost of potassium. Apply to vegies every 6–8 weeks or as product recommends.
- Fish emulsion made from fish waste is a fast-acting organic liquid fertiliser ideal for supplying hungry plants, such as cabbages and leafy greens, with the added nutrients they crave. Apply fortnightly for best results.
- Seaweed extracts are applied as a liquid solution and supply trace elements, stimulate root growth, and improve plant resilience to stress from heat, cold and drought, while also encouraging beneficial microbial activity in the soil. They can be applied anytime and are particularly useful when establishing new plantings and transplants. Apply fortnightly as a tonic to maintain plant vitality. (Vegan friendly).
- Rock minerals made from finely ground mineral-rich rocks add a broad range of macro and micronutrients in a slow-release form. Many products will improve soil fertility by boosting beneficial soil organisms. (Vegan friendly).

Check out these products:

Animal manures and blends
- Organic Xtra: qldorganics.com.au
- Rocky Point ActivGrow Organic Fertiliser: rockypoint.com.au
- Searles 5 IN 1 Organic Fertiliser: searlesgardening.com.au

Blood and bone
- Richgro Blood and Bone Based Premium Fertiliser Plus: richgro.com.au

Liquid fertilisers
- Seasol: seasol.com.au
- Charlie Carp: charliecarp.com.au
- BioGuano: bioguano.com.au

Rock minerals
- Earthlife Garden Mate: earthlife.com.au

PHOTOS: TOP: PHIL DUDMAN/ISTOCK

DIY

RESOURCES FOR THE ORGANIC GARDEN

Turn household waste and local resources into gardening gold! Where possible, seek out local farms and stables for animal manures to use as fertiliser, but be sure to ask about their on-farm practices to make sure their product is safe for an organic garden. Consider keeping a few chickens or even small livestock to provide you with a steady supply of organic nutrients on site. Leave fresh manures to mature for a few months before use.

Making your own compost is easy and free. If you are already doing it, consider bolstering your backyard production by asking neighbours for their unwanted grass clippings and other garden waste for added compost bulk.

Try shredding your own garden waste to use as mulch and make use of strappy-leaf plants, such as lemongrass, vetiver grass and ornamental grasses, which thrive with a good cutback every so often. The prunings are a great alternative to straw mulch. Small garden mulching machines do a great job.

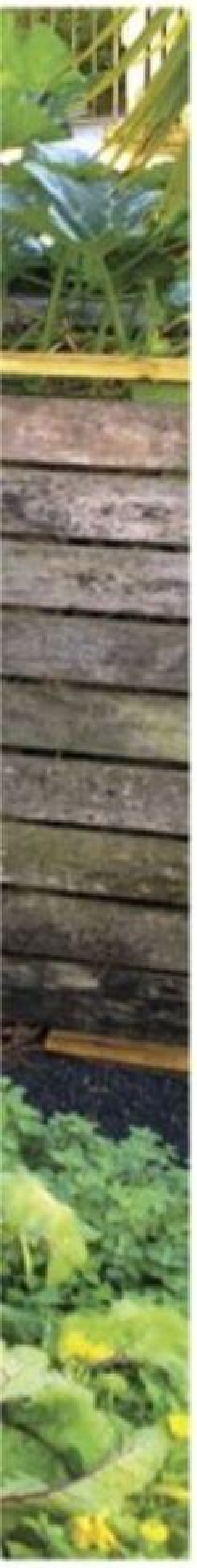
Another fantastic and cost-effective way to boost soil health and fertility is to regularly plant a crop of green manure. Fast growing nitrogen-fixing plants, such as clover, vetch, and lupin, work wonders for improving soil quality when they are dug back into the soil where they were grown to rot down and provide essential nutrients for following crops. Nitrogen-fixers can be combined with other cover crops, such as oats and millet, to provide additional organic bulk and conditioning.

ORGANIC PESTICIDES AND FUNGICIDES

Successful organic pest and disease management requires a holistic approach: regular garden observation and timely intervention are essential. Spotting early signs of pest or disease damage allows you to act before issues spread and become difficult to manage. Encouraging a balanced ecosystem, and attracting predatory insects, such as lacewings and hoverflies (that also help with pollination), helps you to control pests naturally.

- Organic pesticides and fungicides will help you to manage pests and diseases safely without the lingering harmful effects of chemical alternatives.
- Horticultural soaps and natural oils are effective for controlling common pests, such as aphids, whiteflies and mites. These products work by smothering the pests or disrupting their cell membranes, effectively managing infestations.
- *Bacillus thuringiensis* (Bt) is a biological control that specifically targets grubs and caterpillars, while sparing other insects.

PHOTOS: TOP: PHIL DUDMAN/ISTOCK



ORGANIC AND HEIRLOOM SEEDS

Choosing to buy organic seeds from plants cultivated without synthetic chemicals aligns with our commitment to nurturing a cleaner, greener environment for all. Growing treasured heirloom vegetable varieties that are naturally open-pollinated, allows us to save our own viable seeds from season to season. This practice not only cuts costs but also promotes self-sufficiency, reduces our 'seed miles' and builds plant resilience. Each generation saved becomes better adapted to local conditions, leading to plants that thrive in our gardens with less intervention. By preserving heirloom seeds, we also help to maintain a diverse gene pool in our communities essential for crop resilience against diseases and climate changes.

Check out these suppliers:

- **Diggers Club:** diggers.com.au
- **The Seed Collection:** theseedcollection.com.au
- **Organic Seeds Australia:** organicseedsaustralia.com.au

- Pyrethrum, a natural compound derived from the flowers of the pyrethrum daisy plant *(Chrysanthemum cinerariifolium)*, is a broad- spectrum insecticide that is effective in knocking down a wide range of garden pests, including aphids, caterpillars, whiteflies, beetles and leafhoppers. Be aware, pyrethrum can also affect beneficial insects so it must be applied with care to target only the insects that are causing damage.
- In managing fungal issues, organic fungicides, such as copper hydroxide and wettable sulfur and products based on potassium bicarbonate, can control common diseases, such as black spot, powdery mildew and rust. Many of these products act as a protective barrier, helping prevent further spread of the disease by inhibiting the germination of fungal spores.

Check out these products:

- Eco Oil, Eco Fungicide and Eco Pyrethrum PLUS: ecoorganicgarden.com.au
- Yates Natures Way Caterpillar Killer Dipel Insecticide and Nature's Way Citrus and Ornamental Spray (pyrethrum): yates.com.au

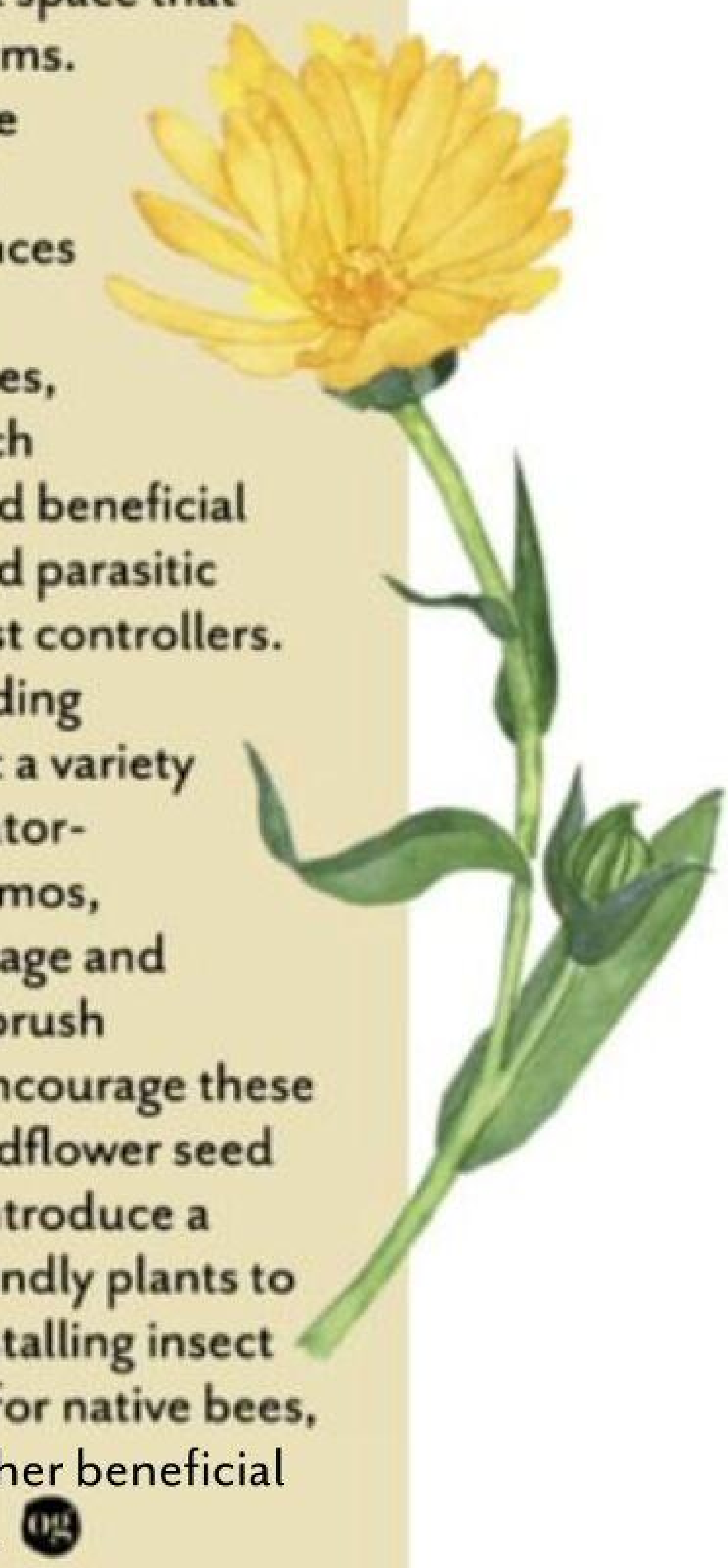
PHOTOS: ISTOCK

Harmonious balance

There's something truly uplifting about gazing out at a garden alive with movement – the gentle hum of bees, butterflies floating between blooms, and ladybugs tucked under leaves. The pleasures of organic gardening go far beyond the notion of just growing a few edible plants; it's about building biodiversity and creating a living ecosystem where every creature has a role, creating a harmonious balance. For the organic gardener, this vibrant activity is a reward in itself, a reminder that the garden isn't just for us – it's a shared space that nurtures life in countless forms.

Building biodiversity in the garden by growing a diverse range of plant species enhances your gardens' resilience by attracting pollinators like bees, butterflies and beetles, which aid our food production, and beneficial insects such as lacewings and parasitic wasps that act as natural pest controllers.

A simple way to start building biodiversity today is to plant a variety of flowers, especially pollinator-friendly species, such as cosmos, calendula, lavender and borage and natives like tea trees, bottlebrush and everlasting daisies, to encourage these helpful visitors. Blended wildflower seed packs offer an easy way to introduce a variety of vibrant, insect-friendly plants to your garden. In addition, installing insect hotels provides safe spaces for native bees, lacewings, hoverflies and other beneficial insects to shelter and thrive.



Green Connect has a fully functioning market garden, growing vegies and fruit.

Facing page: Su Meh started out as a volunteer but is now a senior farmhand.

PHOTO: NEESH PHOTOGRAPHY

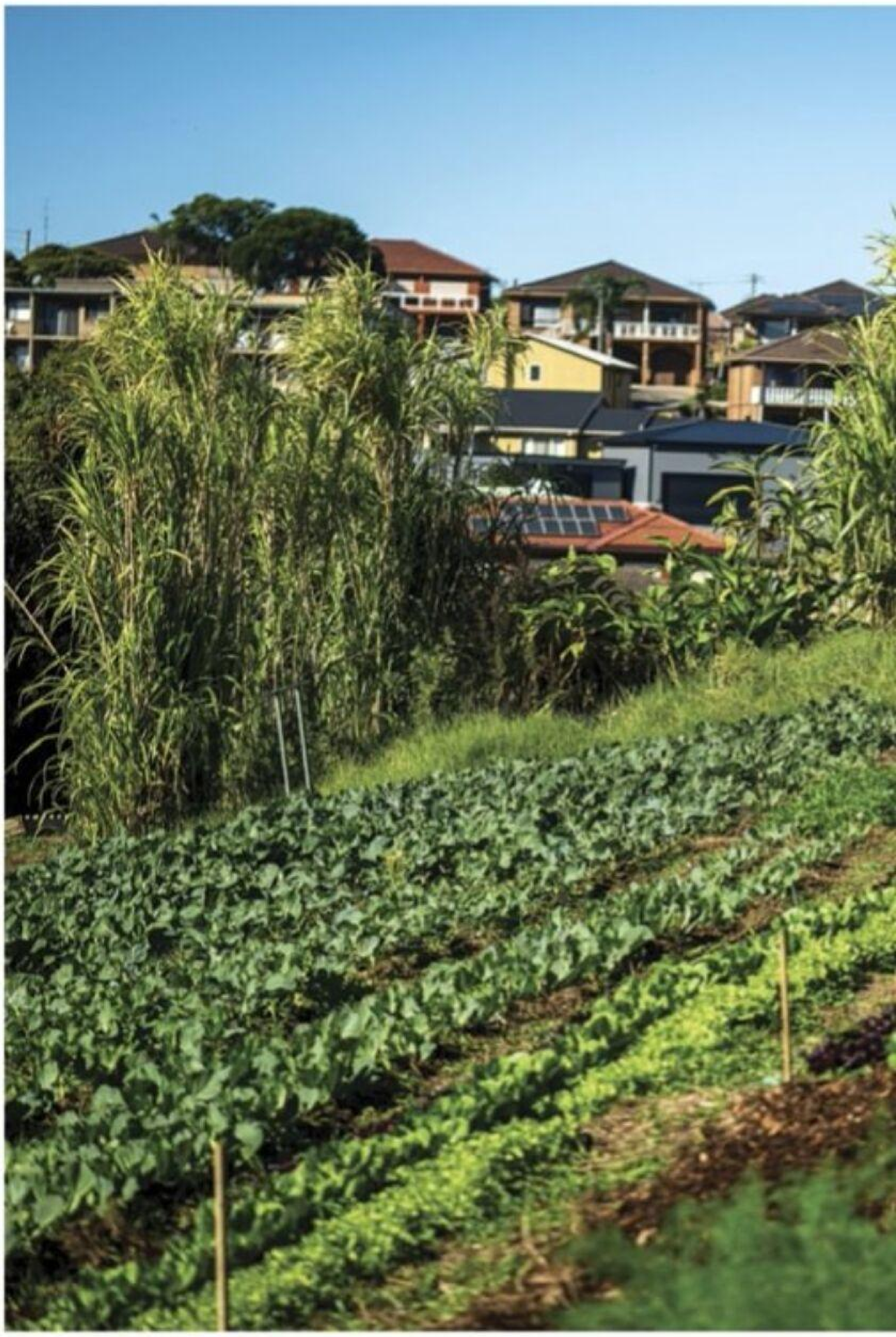
URBAN *sanctuary*

Jacqueline Forster visits an urban farm helping former refugees and young people connect with their community while learning about growing food.

PHOTO: TOMASZ MACHNIK, FLASHPOINT LABS PHOTOGRAPHY

Farm manager Emily Henderson with a lamb.

Right: The farm is located in a gully.



Surely the address I've been given can't be right? I'm on Dharawal Country, in suburban Warrawong, on the industrial outskirts of Wollongong, New South Wales, surrounded by two-storey 1980s brick veneers… looking for a farm?

Yet sure enough, tucked into a hillside amidst the urban sprawl is the productive oasis of Green Connect, a not-for-profit social enterprise connecting community with fair food, ethical employment, and environmental education.

Covering 11 acres (4.5 hectares) that back onto Warrawong public primary and high schools, Green Connect is a fully functioning farm, complete with chickens, goats, sheep, pigs, beehives, and an extensive organic market garden growing food for the local community. Students from the schools incorporate farm visits into the curriculum and undertake work experience here. Other schools, pre-schools, support groups, universities, community and corporate volunteers also visit the farm to experience hands-on activities and contribute to Green Connect's purpose.

"The site was a dairy farm in the 1950s before the Department of Education bought the land and built schools in the 1970s," explains Robert Servine, Green Connect general manager. "The gully, where we are located, sat derelict for decades overrun by weeds, wild goats, and rubbish until an urban farm was established 12 years ago thanks to the high school and Urban Grown; a project for local youth and community to grow food. Green Connect incorporated Urban Grown in 2014 and took it from there."

Today the farm boasts 25 garden beds, food forests, animal enclosures, compost bays, worm farms, teaching and gathering spaces, and an area of remnant subtropical rainforest (managed by Landcare Illawarra), that is home to a large black apple tree (*Pouteria australis* syn. *Planchonella australis*) among other native species.

"I love that I can be in a city but not know it," Robert says.

Farm manager, Emily Henderson shares the sentiment. "You forget where you are when you're on the farm," she says.

Emily coordinates activities at the farm and is surrogate mum to many of its baby animals. She grew up on a sheep farm in New Zealand and contrary to the old adage, loves working with animals and children. The animals contribute

GREEN CONNECT
urban grown food

Damara sheep.
Above: The veg boxes can be delivered weekly.

to a closed loop system: pigs are used to dig over areas, chooks consume vegies scraps, and animal manure is used to fertilise the garden.

Growing transformation

For Emily, though, it's all about education.

"We run environmental education programs at the farm catering to all ages, from farm kindy to high school and TAFE kids. We often have students who complete work experience here and return as an employee or volunteer," Emily says.

"For some kids, who are really disengaged at school, to come and find something they enjoy and are good at – practical hands-on skills – it's the making of them. It's often a miraculous transformation that I really enjoy being part of."

Robert agrees.

"It's magical to see children's confidence around food growing when they visit the farm," he says.

"A couple of generations ago everybody had connection to a farm but now most people live in urban environments without access to gardens. In the early 1900s 50 per cent of the population were farmers, now it's less than 2 per cent."

The farm has around 130 laying hens, protected by a fox-proof enclosure, and six mixed-breed pigs. A pair of hand-reared African fat-tailed Damara sheep act as tour guides, allowing children to get up close to the farm animals. Traditionally grown for meat in Namibia, the Damara breed is hardy and useful.

"They forage on weeds like goats but are much more manageable and don't require shearing. We've got a ram and five ewes we keep as breeders. Our customers value the fact that the meat is ethically raised. Our last release of pork and lamb packs sold out in under five hours."

PHOTOS: TYNEESHA WILLIAMS, NEESH PHOTOGRAPHY; TOP RIGHT: TOMASZ MACHNIK, FLASHPOINT LABS PHOTOGRAPHY

Pleh Meh filling a veg box.

Above left: Emily Henderson helping with planting.

PHOTOS: TYNEESHA WILLIAMS, NEESH PHOTOGRAPHY

Having animals on the farm can change people's perception of food, says Emily. "A couple of our volunteers became vegetarian after working here."

It also makes visitors less wasteful. "The staff who are former refugees are horrified that we don't eat 'nose to tail'," Emily says.

When the meat comes back from the abattoir, the farm keeps cuts that are allowed within food safety guidelines, like the head and trotters, so that every last bit can be used.

Human-centred employment

Green Connect runs a program to assist former refugees and young people overcome barriers and

Senior farmhands Pleh Meh and Su Meh are two of the paid staff.

find pathways to secure employment. The not-for-profit organisation has many sections, including zero waste management and ethical labour hire services, but the farm is where it all starts for participants.

"This is where they come to do work experience training; to learn how to understand time sheets, how to operate tools and equipment like whipper snippers, or about PPE (personal protection equipment). Knowledge expected in a work environment," Emily says. "Then they can get casual work at the farm or one of the other divisions, but the farm is the heart of the operation."

Senior farmhand, Su Meh, came to Australia in 2007 after enduring 25 years in a refugee camp; a place she says was like "jail". She is Karenni, a persecuted people from Myanmar (formerly known as Burma).

"I grew up in a refugee camp on the Thai border. We were not allowed to go anywhere, and we didn't go to school so when I arrived in Australia I had no education," Su Meh says.

Refugee support agency SCARF* (now known as Multicultural Communities Council of Illawarra) was on hand to help humanitarian migrants like Su Meh navigate the fundamentals of day-to-day life in their new home.

"SCARF helped teach me English, they helped me with paperwork, and they introduced me to Green Connect (then known as Urban Grown)," she says.

Su Meh has been involved in the farm from the beginning, first as a volunteer with other former refugees from Myanmar, Africa and Pakistan, and then as a casual worker. She recalls it was very social when the group would work, cook and eat together.

In 2018 Su Meh was made a senior farmhand and has seen the social enterprise grow. "When we first started, we were making 20 or 30 veg boxes but now we sometimes do over 170 in a week."

Su Meh values Green Connect for helping her find ethical employment. "Because I didn't have an education and little English it was very hard to get a job. Green Connect supported me and other refugees.

"I love farmwork because it is so peaceful. I love harvesting vegies and picking flowers but mostly I just love the peace I feel at the farm. It's very beautiful and that makes me happy.

"Green Connect is very important for the community because we grow all the vegies organically, with no chemicals – so it's good for the environment and good for people's heath."

The supportive environment at Green Connect is reflected in Su Meh's personal work, helping newly arrived refugees find their feet in the community.

"I show them how to shop for food, how to go to Centrelink, how to catch the bus, and organise donations for them."

Emily says Su Meh is a great connection in the community. "When she told us about a newly settled family all the volunteers got together to donate clothing and kitchen items to help set them up their new home."

Green Connect subscribers can also pay extra to donate veg boxes to help those in need.

Productive design

Market garden coordinator, Rod Logan, is assisted by four permanent part-time senior farmhands, all former refugees who came through the program. The team complete tasks like soil preparation, weeding, planting, harvesting, and putting together weekly veg boxes for subscribers. The farmhands have also been known to grow favourite plants from their homeland such as lemongrass, turmeric and ginger.

"Last year the ginger harvest was a big success," Emily says. "Su Meh planted three bathtubs full of ginger rhizomes, which yielded between five and eight kilos per tub. We put some in the veg boxes and replanted the rest."

The farm design was based on permaculture principles, incorporating zones, swales and utilising

PHOTO: TOMASZ MACHNIK, FLASHPOINT LABS PHOTOGRAPHY

Senior farmhand Eh Moo harvesting broccoli.

Left: Children visiting the farm can get to know the animals.

plantings such as bana grass to create natural wind breaks. There is continuous focus on soil improvement, growing organically, intercropping and companion planting, and achieving zero waste with the help of animals.

Over 50 different types of vegetables, herbs and fruit are grown. They include perennial crops, such as turmeric and sunchokes, and annual food crops, such as flowering veg (tomatoes, zucchini, broccoli, cabbage), leafy greens (lettuce, silver beet, kale, salad mix leaves), roots, starches, alliums (leek, onions, spring onions) beetroot, radish, carrot, and various herbs. Microclimates help produce tropical fruit, including bananas, papaya, macadamia, champagne fruit, tamarillo, mango and more, although many of the fruit trees are not yet mature.

Like the CSA (community supported agriculture) model, veg box subscribers order from the farm on a weekly or fortnightly basis and can choose between standard boxes or 'pick your own produce' boxes. Extras such as flowers, honey and eggs can be added.

"Last year we provided well over 7000 boxes of produce to the local community" Emily says. "We don't grow some items, like potatoes, because we haven't got the space, so we supplement our veg boxes with certified organic produce because everyone wants potatoes!"

Robert explains that the Green Connect farm isn't certified organic.

"The cost and effort of certification wouldn't have benefited the size of our operation," Robert says.

"But we follow organic principles, and the community are welcome to come and look at the way we farm any time. We hold veg box subscriber morning and afternoon teas every few months so we're fully transparent.

"We do struggle with pests, but we only use organic certified products, netting and biological controls like lacewings to combat aphids, which were a big problem last year."

Teamwork

In addition to paid staff Emily is grateful to the dedicated volunteers.

"We are lucky to have some very talented regular volunteers who help with jobs like planting and bed preparation, brush cutting, and constructing paths and bridges. It's a really good team, everyone is on the same journey and are very supportive of each other."

"Most of our community love us," Robert says. "I recently saw a real estate ad that used the fact that a house backed onto the farm as a selling point!"

"A lot of our neighbours are elderly ex-steelworkers who love to drag me into their backyard to show me their garden," Emily says. "There's a bit of a bartering system going on where they offer us some of their produce in exchange for some of our seedlings. It's been lovely getting to know them.

"We tend to attract people who are passionate about growing food. Some people fall in love with the farm and never want to leave." og

*Green Connect was originally founded by SCARF when they got a grant to employ refugees. The Port Kembla area of Wollongong, NSW, has a history of resettling migrants that started with European refugees after World War II.

● For more information about Green Connect, to arrange a visit, or purchase a veg box see **green-connect.com.au**

PHOTO TOP RIGHT: TYNEESHA WILLIAMS, NEESH PHOTOGRAPHY

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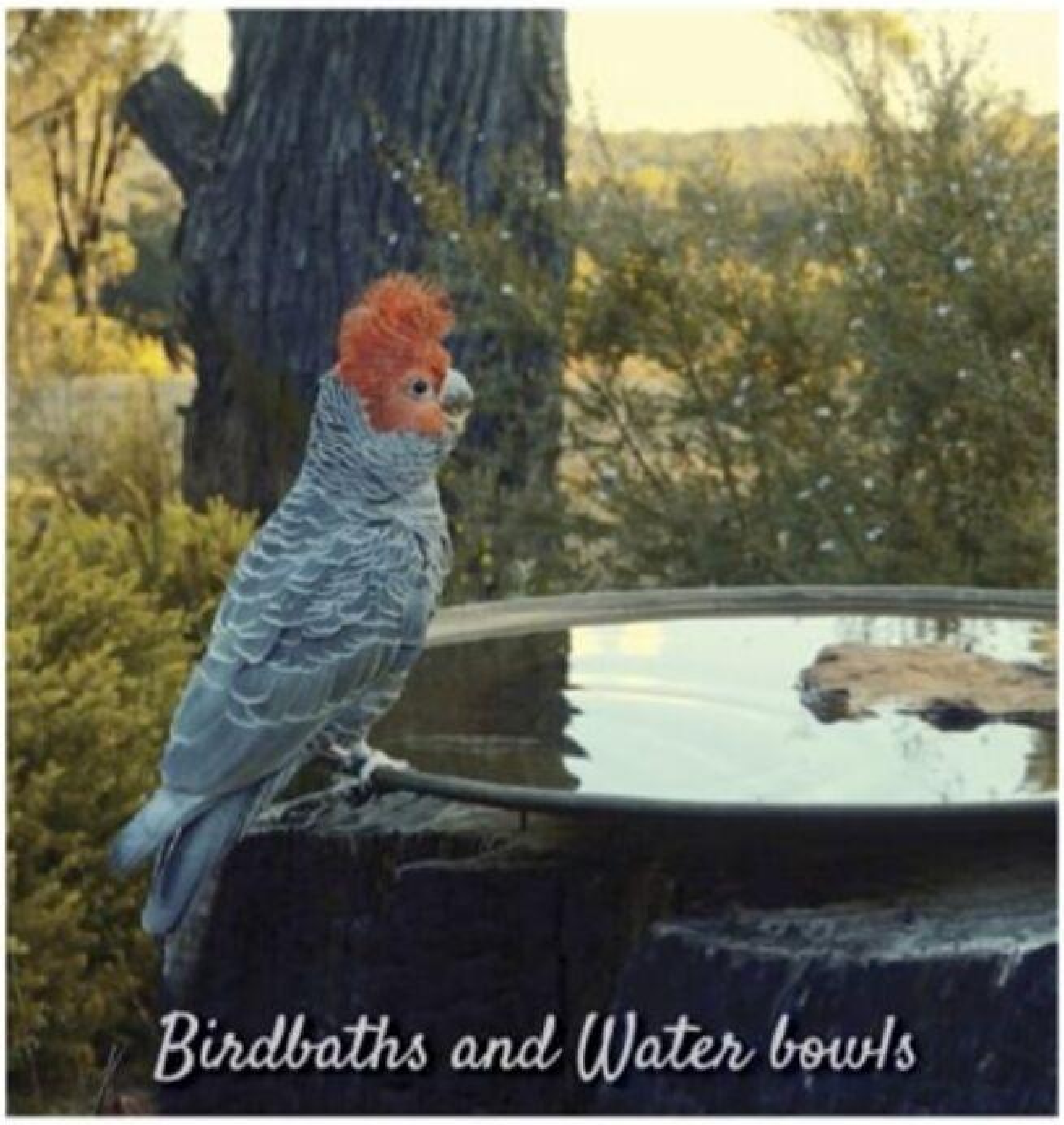

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- AquaZoom Compact
- Flex Water Computer
- Pressure Sprayer 1.25 L
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These pictures are from a shed in suburban Melbourne: a small but mighty structure, providing a lovely space for saving seeds and garden planning, as well as storage. And it's so cute!

Enter today – it's easy!

HOW TO ENTER

Send us picture/pictures of your shed both inside and out, plus a description of 250 words or less. Make the pics as high resolution as possible. There's a couple of ways to enter:

ONLINE: Head to organicgardener.com.au and click on the link to find the entry form (just scroll on down if you don't see it at first).

OR YOU CAN: Scan the QR code which takes you to the website entry form.

POST EVERYTHING TO US AT:
Show Us Your Shed, nextmedia, Locked Bag
5555, St Leonards, NSW 1590

YOU CAN ALSO SEND EVERYTHING VIA EMAIL: editor@organicgardener.com.au

Terms and conditions Competition open to Australian residents only. Competition opens at midnight AEST on 31/10/24 and closes 11:59pm AEST on 29/01/25. This is a game of skill. To be eligible to win you must send in pictures of your shed along with description of how it was made, including the material used, special aspects of functionality, who made it. Three (3) Gardena prize packs will be won: First prize pack valued at $3000.25; Second Prize pack valued at $1495.87; Third prize pack valued at $500.46. Total prize pool is $4996.58 (Incl. GST). Entries will be judged by the ABC Organic Gardener editorial team on 05/02/25. Full T&Cs are available at organicgardener.com.au/show-us-your-shed-terms-conditions/. Items in prize packs may differ from images shown, depending on availability.

Seeking cover

Gardening is our go-to activity when we have spare time but it carries with it a few hazards to watch out for: too much sun, biting insects, and minor cuts and scrapes that could lead to infection. **Leanne Croker** outlines simple ways to protect yourself.

SUN, SUN, SUN

For new gardeners and even more experienced ones who may have become a bit blasé about garden safety, it's important to know that gardening, although fulfilling and productive, does come with dangers. The good news is, preventative measures are usually easy and low cost. Sun exposure is perhaps the number one issue for gardeners. There has been a growing awareness of the connection between solar ultraviolet radiation (UVR) and skin cancer since the early 1980s, when melanoma rates were rising and the 'Slip, Slop, Slap' health campaign was launched.

The Cancer Council NSW states that "over 95 per cent of skin cancers are caused by exposure to UV radiation," so preventive protection and regular skin checks are a must for everyone – but especially gardeners who spend a lot of time outdoors. Read on for the key things to do for summer protection.

Did you KNOW?

It is easy to download the free global UV app here: **sunsmart.com.au/resources/sunsmart-app.** Then all you need to do is check the UV at the beginning of the day and plan your gardening, and sun protection, accordingly.

SUNSCREENS

Slop on that sunscreen once, and then at regular intervals throughout your time in the garden. Always check use-by dates when purchasing sunscreens and look for the following on the labels:

- An AUST L number means it is listed on the TGA Australian Register of Therapeutic Goods (ARTG). There may also be reference to AS/NZS 2604:2021 as this is the Australian Standard for sunscreens.
- A sun protection factor (SPF) of SPF30 or above. SPF 50+ filters out 98 per cent of UV radiation compared to 96.7 per cent for SPF 30+.
- Broad spectrum means it protects against both UVA and UVB rays, both of which contribute to skin cancer risk.
- Physical or mineral sunscreens have been shown to be less harmful to the environment than chemical sunscreens, which can also produce harmful byproducts. Look for certified organic or natural sunscreens that meet the above standards.

THE BEST HATS

Slap on the right type of hat and you can shield your head, face, ears and neck from UVR. The following are best:

- Broad-brimmed and bucket hats have a wide brim around the entire edge offer the best overall coverage.
- Legionnaire-style hats include fabric at the back of the hat to cover the neck, providing additional protection.
- Avoid baseball caps that don't protect the side of the face, ears and sometimes nose.

CLOTHING

Slipping on your gardening clothes is less fashion statement and more body armour. Consider the following:

- Choose shirts with collars/high necks and sleeves.
- For the lower half cover as much below the knee as possible so trousers, longer shorts or skirts.
- Wear loose clothing for better coverage.
- Choose tightly woven fabrics; check light transmission for effectiveness.
- Synthetic or blended fabrics provide better UV protection; avoid stretched, wet, or worn materials.

SKIN REPAIR

Aloe vera can help repair damaged skin. You can buy organic and pure versions, or grow it yourself – head here to find out how: organicgardener.com.au/grow-your-own-aloe.

There are also a large range of certified organic and natural skin care available that contain healing and repairing ingredients such as aloe vera, paw paw and more. It means your skin is getting soothing repair without any nasty synthetic chemicals. Look for these online or in wholefood stores.

WHAT DOES UPF MEAN?

Some clothing includes a UPF (Ultraviolet Protection Factor) rating, which indicates how much skin is covered and how well the fabric blocks UV rays. There are four UPF ratings for clothes:

UPF rating	UPF Classification	% UV radiation blocked
15	Minimum protection	93.35%
30	Good protection	96.7%
50, 50+	Excellent protection	98%

PHOTOS & ILLUSTRATIONS: ISTOCK

> A medium canopy tree can provide up to 60 per cent UVR protection and is suitable for short stays.

SHADE

Seek or create a place to work in the shade, or head inside during the hottest parts of the day. A medium canopy tree can provide up to 60 per cent UVR protection and is suitable for short stays.

You could also erect shade sails. One option that will give you some flexibility is fabric made from a high-quality shade cloth or PVC, which can block up to 95–99 per cent of UV rays and can allow some light and air flow. For more ideas visit: arpansa.gov.au/understanding-radiation/radiation-sources/more-radiation-sources/sun-protection-shade

SUNGLASSES

Slide on those shades when you reach for your hat. Wear close-fitting, wraparound sunglasses that meet Australian Standard AS/NZS 1067.1:2016, with lens categories 2, 3, or 4.

Avoid category 0 and 1 as they are for fashion only. If you have a junior gardener in your family, make sure the sunglasses you purchase for your baby or child also meet the same Australian Standard as for adults and fit closely to the face.

GLOVES

Gloves provide some sun protection – sunscreen won't last long when hands get dirty, sweaty or wet. Most importantly, though, they protect from general wear and tear, potential infection from soils and fertilisers, from thorns when weeding and pruning, and bites from insects, including potentially dangerous ones such as spiders.

Cloth: Tend to be more affordable and might be more comfortable (the material is cool and breathable) but they give minimal protection.

Leather: More costly but durable, these gloves provide protection against thorns, cuts and scrapes.

Synthetic rubber: Give good protection when handling fertilisers and soils, and from cuts and scrapes. Allow for flexible hand movement.

You may have different gloves for different jobs, or a mix of materials (cotton lining with rubber palm and fingers, for example).

FOOTWEAR

Safe and secure is the way to go when choosing gardening shoes. You want them to protect your toes, be waterproof, have great grip and be comfortable. Durability is also important.

Slip-on clogs are convenient when ducking out to pick vegies for your dinner, but be cautious at night in summer when snakes may be about.

MASKS ALERT

Don't forget to have a box of face masks to wear that cover your nose and mouth while you are opening and handling bags of compost, manure and fertilisers. Legionnaires' disease can be present and is a real threat, especially to the elderly and people with weakened immune systems.

Mossies

An increasing problem in a warming, sometimes wetter climate are mosquitoes. It is not just the nuisance factor – mosquito-borne diseases are becoming more problematic, including clusters of Buruli ulcers (a tropical skin disease now occurring even in Victoria). Clothing that covers most of the body is the easiest way to protect, but look for natural repellents for face and hands.

> For more information on sun protection and latest recommendations head to cancer.org.au.

ILLUSTRATIONS: ISTOCK

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Time for giving

Presents from your garden or preserves from your harvests, will make welcome gifts. Plus, save seed, share and start DIY projects.

Succulents are easy to propagate and turn shoots into gifts.

PHOTO: ISTOCK

WARM TEMPERATE

Karen Sutherland

POT UP A PRESENT Make some easy gifts by potting up succulents from your garden or balcony. Succulents such as echeverias, which have multiplied, can be divided into more plants by gently pulling apart or cutting with sharp snips or a knife. Allow offshoot ends to dry and callous over for a day or so, to avoid rot. Pot up using succulent potting mix and make sure your pots have adequate drainage holes.

MAINTAIN TOMATOES Tall, vigorous tomato plants are usually vine or indeterminate types, and they will continue to grow and produce fruit until stopped by cold weather or disease. As they grow, their lower leaves yellow and need to be removed, to promote airflow, reduce diseases, and help fruit ripen.

GROW YOUR OWN STAKES Bamboo is a hardy plant which has canes that can be used as garden stakes. When grown to the height needed, cut the cane and trim off leafy stalks. The stakes have a variety of uses: bend from one raised bed to another to make an arch for climbing beans; tie 3–4 stakes together with jute string for a snow pea teepee; or use small stakes to support bush beans, capsicums and eggplants. To prevent bamboo spreading and becoming a problem, grow in a pot or choose clumping bamboos, which spread far less vigorously.

Above: A teepee for growing plants can be easily made from homegrown bamboo.

Left: Sprinkle blood and bone around fruiting vegetables to boost production.

COOL TEMPERATE

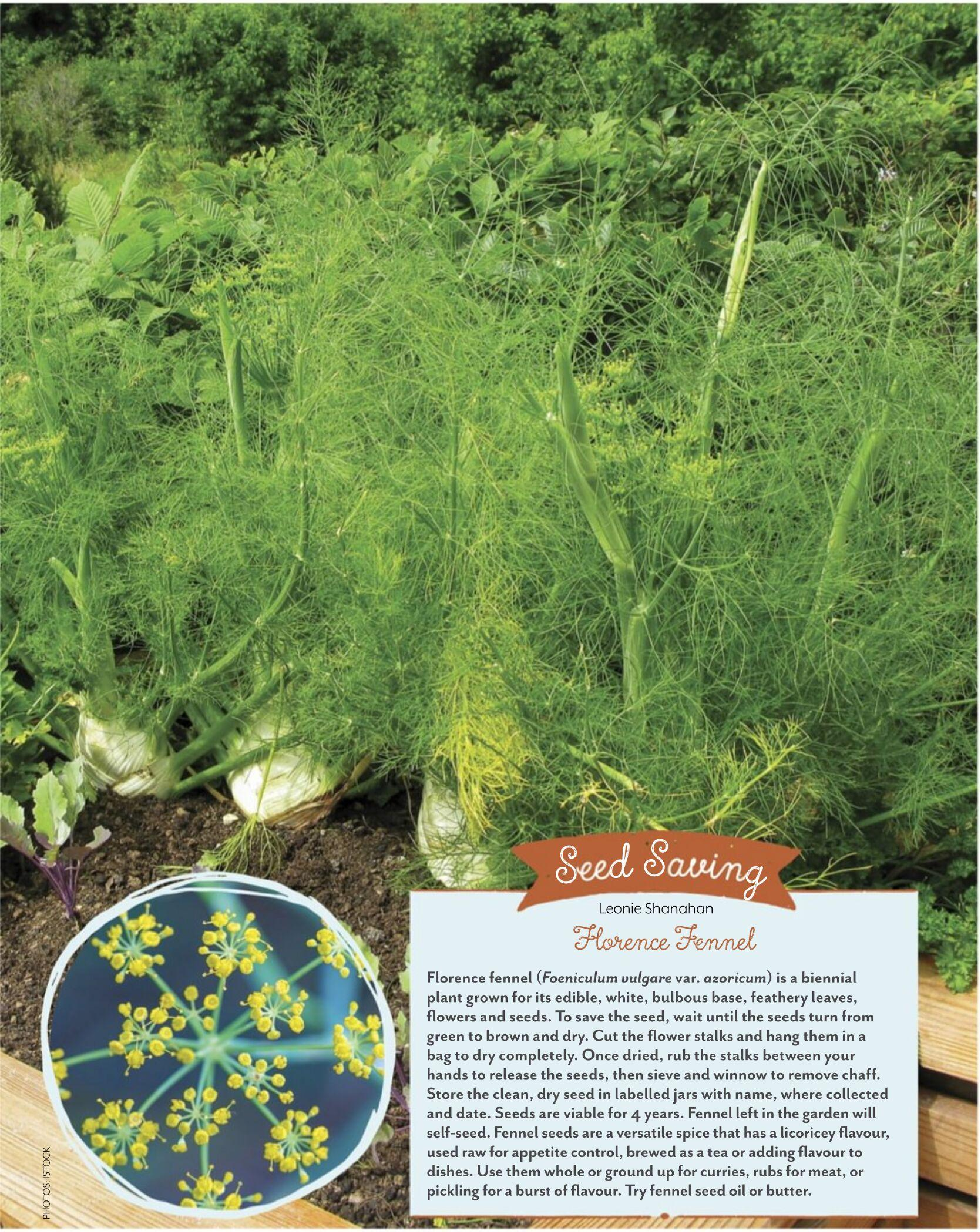
Karen Sutherland

MANAGE BROWN ROT Humidity and warmer weather promotes brown rot in stone fruits. Their spores are spread by wind, insects and infected fruits touching neighbouring fruit. Brown rot can overwinter on twigs and mummified fruits on trees and on the ground below. Prune trees late summer (for quicker healing) to open up the tree and encourage good airflow, sterilising secateurs with sprays of methylated spirits between cuts. Early summer, remove infected fruit and their twigs and pick up fallen fruit. Dispose of fruits in bin or bury them deeply. Burn or bury twigs.

FERTILISE FRUITING VEGETABLES Once fruiting vegetables start flowering, boost their production by sprinkling blood and bone around the base of plants. Check the product packaging for recommended application rates. Apply to damp soil and water well after applying.

SAVE SEED Growing your own food from seeds you've collected from previous crops closes the food growing loop, saves money and brings immense satisfaction. Saving your own seeds over time allows those cultivars to adapt to local conditions, helping your plants be better adapted to our changing climate. Saving seeds protects heritage varieties and their stories from being lost, and growing from seed creates less landfill from seedling punnets.

PHOTOS: KAREN SUTHERLAND



PHOTOS: ISTOCK

Seed Saving

Leonie Shanahan

Florence Fennel

Florence fennel (*Foeniculum vulgare* var. *azoricum*) is a biennial plant grown for its edible, white, bulbous base, feathery leaves, flowers and seeds. To save the seed, wait until the seeds turn from green to brown and dry. Cut the flower stalks and hang them in a bag to dry completely. Once dried, rub the stalks between your hands to release the seeds, then sieve and winnow to remove chaff. Store the clean, dry seed in labelled jars with name, where collected and date. Seeds are viable for 4 years. Fennel left in the garden will self-seed. Fennel seeds are a versatile spice that has a licoricey flavour, used raw for appetite control, brewed as a tea or adding flavour to dishes. Use them whole or ground up for curries, rubs for meat, or pickling for a burst of flavour. Try fennel seed oil or butter.

Malabar spinach.

TROPICAL

Leonie Shanahan

CREATE COMMUNITY BY SHARING Build stronger, more resilient communities by starting a regular harvest swap. Gather at a local park, hall or community garden and bring along excess produce, plants, jars, preserves or anything homemade to share. Including a speaker to talk at your meet-ups can offer valuable insights into different plants, how to cook them and ways to make the most of seasonal produce. After the talk, participants are invited to take what they need. It is a wonderful opportunity to share knowledge, food and foster connections.

MAKE A CUPPA AND RELAX Take the time to relax in your garden, especially as it is probably hot and humid, encouraging you to slow down and connect with mother nature. Grab a drink, sit down and relax and plan to maximise your garden's food potential, whether it is in beds, vertical spaces, your verge or even pots on your decking. Get back to creating your edible oasis when the weather cools.

GROW TROPICAL PERENNIALS Consider planting tropical perennial edibles that are not only delicious but easy to grow and propagate, allowing you to share excess produce with others. Aibika, arrowroot, betel leaf, Brazilian spinach, cassava, kangkong, katuk, Malabar spinach, and sambung are well suited to the tropics. These plants will provide you with a continuous source of nutritional food.

ARID/SEMI-ARID

MOVE POTTED PLANTS If your herbs and other potted plants are feeling the heat, it might be time to give them a little vacation! Move them to a cooler, more comfortable spot — away from hot, reflective surfaces. Look for a place that offers some filtered light or shade during the hottest part of the day. If you are short on shady real estate, consider grouping your containers and popping up a simple frame with shade cloth over the top. Or, let the bigger, tougher plants provide a little shelter to more sensitive ones underneath.

TACKLE HYDROPHOBIC SOILS It's common for garden soils to become dry and water repellent in summer. You may notice this happening with potting mixes, too, where it shrinks and water runs down the inside of the pot rather than soaking the root ball with the moisture it so desperately needs. A reliable way to combat this and improve water penetration is to apply an organic humus-based liquid wetting agent. Also, apply diluted seaweed extract regularly to strengthen plant cells and help your plants be more resilient to moisture stress.

MAKE YOUR OWN POTTING MIX This is a fantastic way to become more self-reliant in the garden, save some cash, and give your container plants a natural boost! The secret ingredient is homemade compost — so be sure you're making plenty of it. For an extra kick, toss in some worm castings for some added nutrients and coir peat to help hold moisture. For improved drainage and airflow, add some perlite or coarse sand to the mix. Here's a simple recipe to get you started: 3 parts compost, 1 part coir peat, 1 part worm castings, and 1 part perlite.

Making your own potting mix is one way of using up your compost and worm castings, as well as saving you money.

Red amaranth will self seed.

SUBTROPICAL

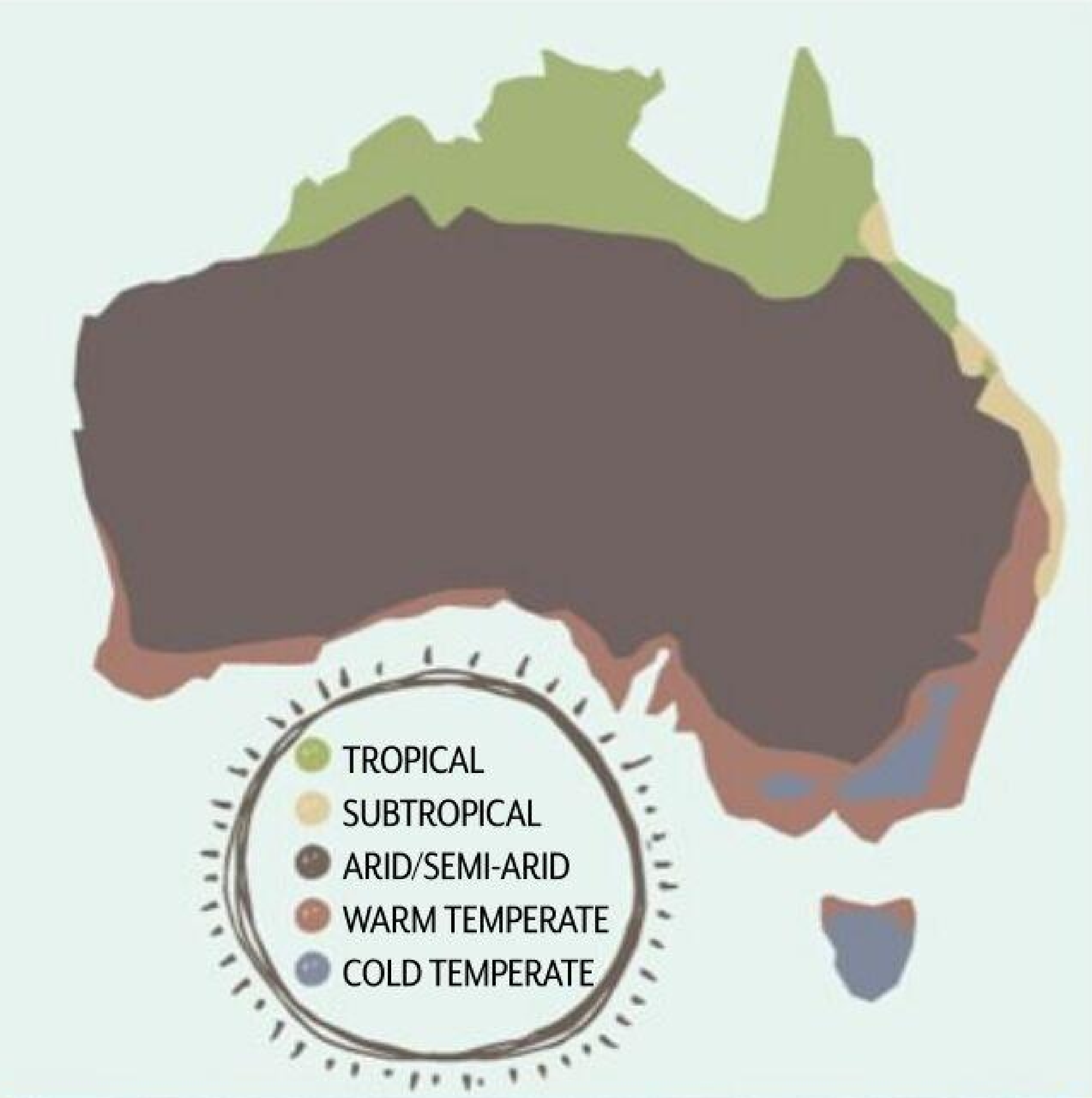
Leonie Shanahan

MAKE PRESERVES FOR YOUR PANTRY BANK Don't waste excess fruit and vegetables; get creative by preserving them through methods like sauces, jams, canning or dehydrating for snacks and future meals. Preserved foods can be used for bartering. Spoilt food can go into compost to become feed for soil and future crops. You'll find preserving tips on page 65.

ENCOURAGE SELF-SEEDING EDIBLES If you have limited time to garden, plant self-seeding edibles – once you have planted them and allowed the plants to produce seed, every year they will regrow without you having to replant. Consider amaranth, basil, coriander, herb robert, mustard greens, nasturtiums, radish, rocket and cosmos.

CONTROL FRUIT FLY There are two common types of fruit fly: Queensland fruit fly (*Bactrocera tryoni*) and Mediterranean fruit fly (*Ceratitis capitata*). Both are highly destructive to fruit and it is essential to be proactive in controlling them. Start by regularly checking fruit trees and removing all fallen fruit. Place exclusion bags over fruit or net the entire tree. Set up lure traps – cut the top off a plastic bottle and invert as a funnel then add some apple cider vinegar or buy natural wild may traps. Keep traps maintained by emptying, refilling or replacing them.

PHOTOS: ISTOCK



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Plant/Sow	December	January
ASIAN GREENS	🟢🟡🟠🔵	🟡🟠🔵
BASIL	🟢🟡🟤🟠🔵	🟢🟡🟤🟠🔵
BEAN: FRENCH/CLIMB	🟤🟠🔵	🟤🟠
BEAN: SNAKE	🟢🟡🟠	🟢🟡
BEETROOT	🟠🔵	🟠🔵
BROCCOLI	🔵	🔵
BRUSSELS SPROUTS	🔵	🟠🔵
CABBAGE	🟠🔵	🟠🔵
CAPSICUM/CHILLI	🟢🟡🟤🟠🔵	🟢🟡🟤🟠
CARROT	🟠🔵	🟠🔵
CAULIFLOWER	🟠🔵	🟡🟠🔵
CUCUMBER	🟢🟡🟤🟠🔵	🟢🟡🟤🟠
EGGPLANT	🟢🟡🟤🟠🔵	🟢🟡🟤🔵
GINGER	🟢🟡🟤🟠	🟢🟡🟤🟠
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KALE	🟠🔵	🟠🔵
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PUMPKIN	🟡🟤🟠🔵	🟡🟤🟠🔵
RADISH	🟡🟤🟠🔵	🟡🟤🟠🔵
SILVERBEET	🟠🔵	🟠🔵
SPRING ONION	🟤🟠🔵	🟤🟠🔵
SWEDE	🔵	🟠🔵
SWEETCORN	🟢🟡🟤🟠🔵	🟢🟡🟤🟠
SWEET POTATO	🟢🟡🟤🟠	🟢
TOMATO	🟡🟤🟠🔵	🟡🟤🟠
TURNIP	🔵	🟠🔵
ZUCCHINI/SQUASH	🟡🟤🟠🔵	🟡🟤🟠🔵

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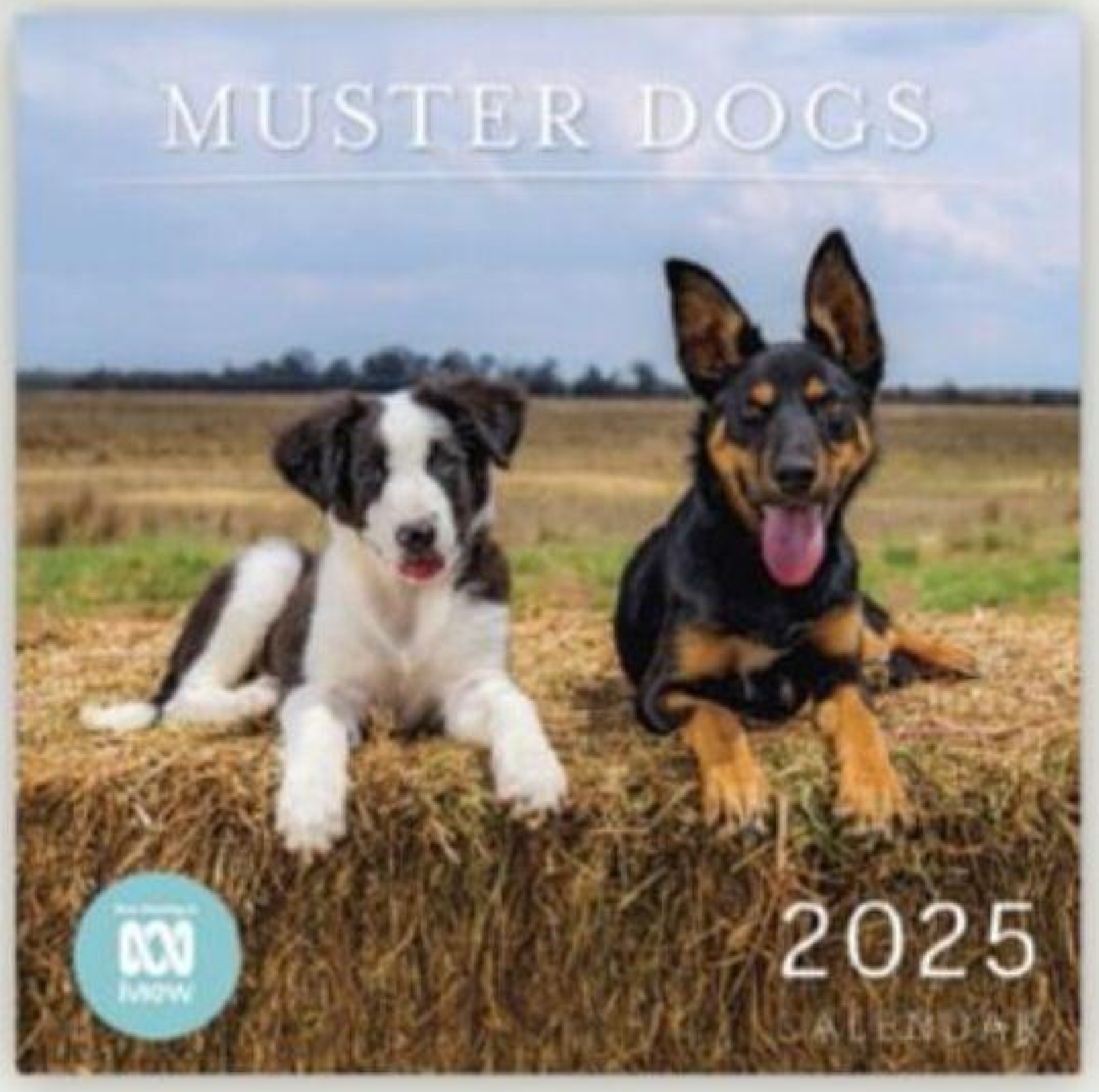
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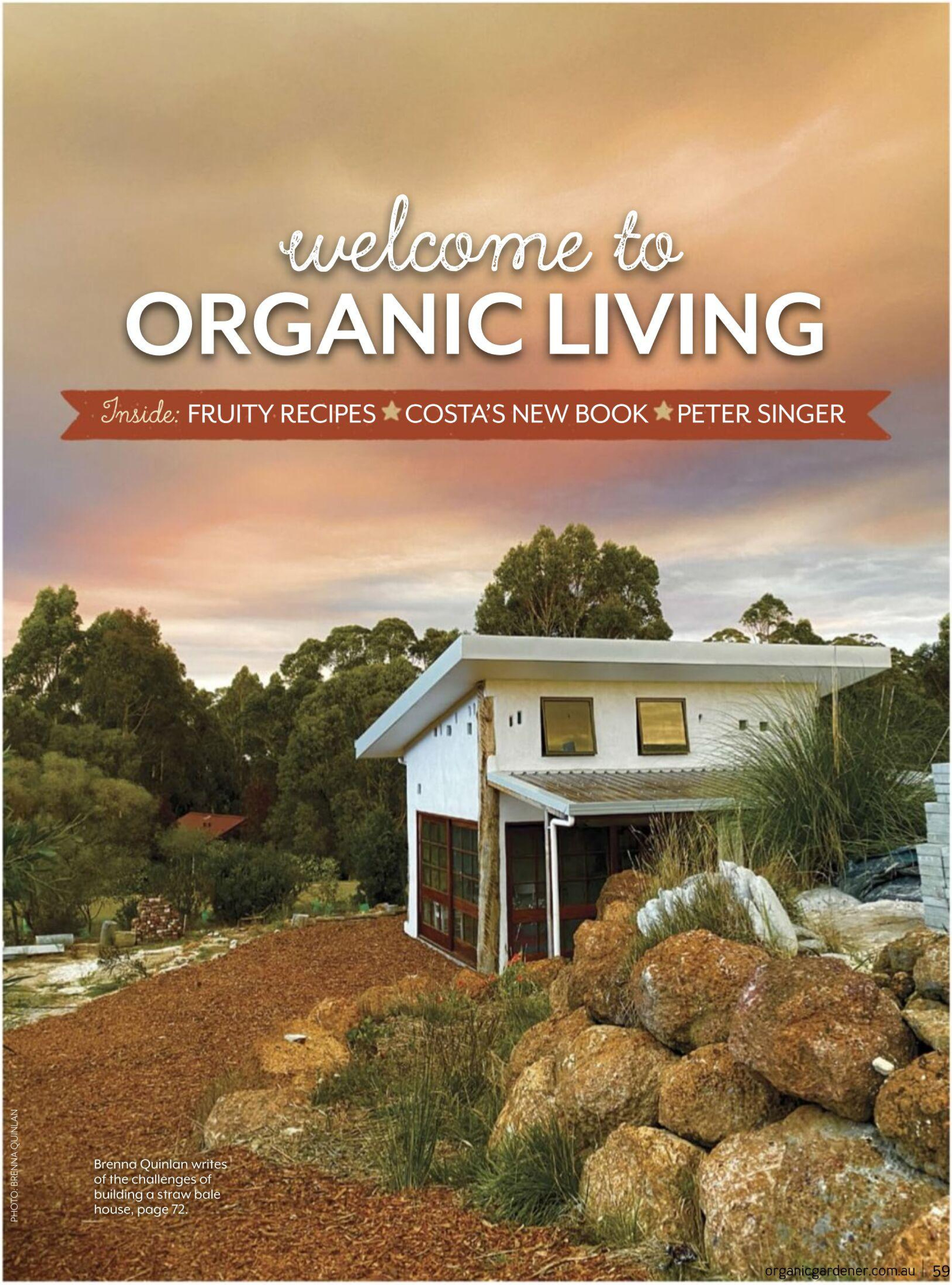
ORGANIC LIVING

Inside: FRUITY RECIPES ★ COSTA'S NEW BOOK ★ PETER SINGER



Brenna Quinlan writes of the challenges of building a straw bale house, page 72.

PHOTO: BRENNA QUINLAN

In all sweetness

Pippa and Michael James are dedicated to connecting people, place and planet through food. In their new book *Sweet Seasons* they offer more than 80 scrumptious recipes that allow us to embrace the creativity of seasonal cooking.

Brown butter plum clafoutis

The wow-factor of a clafoutis is inversely proportional to the ease of making one. Just before dinner, make a quick batter, lay some beautiful seasonal fruit into a baking dish and pour the batter over the top. Pop it in the oven while you eat your meal and enjoy a creamy, fruit-based, baked custard pudding to follow. No pastry, no fuss. You can even make the batter in advance and use it straight from the fridge.

Serves 4

4 medium-sized blood plums
50g unsalted butter
2 medium eggs, at room temperature
60g raw (demerara) sugar
50g plain (all-purpose) flour
50g ground almonds
1 vanilla bean, seeds scraped (or 1 teaspoon vanilla paste)
Pinch of fine sea salt
300g full-cream (whole) milk
Unsalted butter, for greasing
Vanilla bean ice cream, to serve

1. Halve the plums and remove the stones. Cut each half into three wedges and set aside.
2. Melt the butter in a small saucepan over a medium heat, and cook until it starts to foam and gives off a nutty aroma. Remove from the heat and pass it through a fine sieve into a small bowl.
3. Whisk the eggs and sugar in a medium bowl to combine. Add the flour, ground almonds, vanilla and salt and mix well. Add the milk and butter, and whisk until combined, with no lumps. Rest the mixture in the fridge for 20 minutes, or overnight.
4. Preheat the oven to 190°C. Brush four shallow dishes, roughly 15cm in diameter, with butter. Arrange 5–6 wedges of plum in each dish, cut-side up, then pour the batter around the fruit. You should still be able to see the tops of the plums.
5. Bake for 20–25 minutes until the top is golden and there is a slight wobble in the centre. Leave to cool for 5 minutes, then serve hot with a scoop of your favourite ice cream on top, or simply enjoy the texture of the fruit and baked custard together.

Seasons shared

Cherry clafoutis is a late-spring classic – just be sure to tell your guests to mind the pips. Any stone fruit works in summer, and fig clafoutis is for early autumn. Use poached quinces in winter for a fireside dessert.

Seasons altered

You're only really limited by your imagination in the making of this cheat's jam. Any mix of berries work here, and you can even add some apple or rhubarb into the mix. Try strawberry gum, lemon myrtle, cinnamon myrtle or fresh bay leaves in place of rose geranium.

Sweet Seasons

This is an edited extract from *Sweet Seasons* by Michael and Pippa James, photography by Rochelle Eagle (Hardie Grant Books, $50).

Berry and rose geranium compote

A quick and easy way to make your fruit go further, a compote is a great way to use up those berries you bought excitedly at the market but didn't finish when they were at their peak. While the leaves of rose geranium are not edible, they can be used to infuse any number of things with a gentle, rose-like scent – just be sure to remove them before you eat the compote. Enjoy your compote warm or cold, over porridge, pancakes, cake, Greek yoghurt or ice cream, or fold it through freshly whipped cream to fill your sponge. Endlessly adaptable and infinitely useful.

Makes 200g

300g mixed berries
60g raw caster (superfine) sugar
15g lemon juice
4–5 rose geranium leaves

1. Hull the berries and rinse them under cold water. Put them in a saucepan with the sugar, lemon juice and rose geranium leaves. Place the pan over a low-medium heat and bring it to a gentle simmer, stirring to dissolve the sugar and mix everything together. Continue to cook, stirring occasionally, for 15–20 minutes, until the berries soften and start to release their juices and the compote thickens.
2. Remove from the heat and serve immediately or allow to cool. Store in an airtight container in the fridge for up to 1 week.

IN SEASON

Fruit

APRICOT
AVOCADO
BANANA
BLACKBERRY
BLUEBERRY
BOYSENBERRY
CHERRY
LYCHEE
MANGO
MELON
NECTARINE
PASSIONFRUIT
PAWPAW
PEACH
PINEAPPLE
PLUM
RASPBERRY
ROCKMELON
RAMBUTAN
STARFRUIT
STRAWBERRY
TAMARILLO
WATERMELON
YOUNGBERRY

Vegetables

ASPARAGUS
BEAN
BEETROOT
CARROT
CELERIAC
CELERY
CHILLI
CUCUMBER
EGGPLANT
LEEK
LETTUCE
OKRA
ONION
POTATO
RADISH
SILVERBEET
SNOW PEA
SPRING ONION
SQUASH
SWEET CORN
TOMATO
ZUCCHINI

Herbs

BASIL
CHIVE
CURRY LEAF
DILL
FENNEL
LEMON BALM
MINT
OREGANO
PARSLEY
ROSEMARY
SAGE
TARRAGON
THYME

HARVEST NOTES

Plums

Harvesting plums is a treat! You'll know they're ready when they feel slightly soft and come off the stem easily with a gentle twist. Pick them carefully to avoid bruising and store any extras in the fridge to keep them fresh for a week or so, use them for making jam and sauces.

Carrot

To enjoy sweet baby carrots, pull them up when the tap roots are finger-sized. For mature ones, wait until they're shoulders are 2–3cm thick. Loosen the soil with a fork before pulling them gently to avoid snapping. Keep them cool and dry in the fridge, and they'll stay crunchy for weeks.

Chive

Harvest chives when they're about 15cm tall. Trim a couple of centimetres above the base, leaving enough for regrowth. Keep the soil moist but not soggy; chives love a regular drink. Feed every four weeks with diluted fish emulsion to keep your chives lush and ready for more harvests.

Summer in a bottle!

Mara Ripani explains the process of bottling summer fruits so you can enjoy your harvest for months to come.

One of the joys of summer is the abundance of delicious fruits on offer, whether at farmers markets and grocers or in your own garden. Sometimes in such abundance it's falling on the ground and it's a struggle to give it away.

The best remedy is bottling and preserving so you can enjoy the taste of summer all year long. Lots of summer fruits are great for bottling, including peaches, plums, apricots, apples and pears.

Introducing the boiling water bath method

The process used to preserve summer fruits at home is called the 'boiling water bath' method. This method effectively kills most bacteria/yeasts and inhibits bacterial spores, using a combination of time, temperature, acidity and vacuum seals.

The skills needed are easy to learn, that's why countless people before us have been doing it for generations. In short, fruits are prepared and placed in clean, warm jars, sealed with a preserving lid. The jars are then submerged in hot water, brought to the boil, and boiled for the time prescribed in your recipe.

To do this, you'll need a large stock pot with a lid. It should be just a little wider than your cooktop ring and deep enough to fully submerge your jars with at least 25mm of boiling water above them. Of course, you also need some preserving jars with sound sealable lids. Many preserving kits can be found second hand, but also new online (see 'more information' on the next page)

As long as the recipe calls for 10 minutes or more of boiling at sea level, this effectively sterilises the jar, lid and contents, and there's no need to sterilise the jar and lid before filling with fruit – they just need to be clean. However, many recipes recommend sterilising as an added insurance for home bottlers.

After the boil, the jars are left to cool until the lids create a vacuum seal on top.

Did you know?

SEA LEVEL AND PROCESSING TIMES

The boiling point of water decreases as altitude increases, so the boiling time required for bottling foods also changes. Many recipes will give you a recommended boiling time based on sea level requirements. Find out your elevation and make adjustments where necessary:

Sea level (0–304.8m): follow recipe times
304.8m–914.4m: add 5 minutes
914.4m–1828.8m: add 10 minutes

PHOTOS: MAIN: ANNEMARIE BOLDUC @BOTTLE&BRUSHSTUDIO/RIGHT: ISTOCK

Other tips for successful bottling

Acidity: Most fruits are high in acidity, which is important for their preservation when bottling. Some fruits such as tomatoes, figs, pears and apricots are considered low in acidity so you'll need to add lemon juice or citric acid, according to your chosen recipe.

Preparation: Always give your fruit a good wash. Some peels can be a bit tough and are best removed before bottling. You should also cut out markings and other damaged sections. Sometimes it's best to remove any pips.

Bottling liquid: Depending on the recipe, you can backfill and cover your fruit with water, juice or syrup. The liquid is normally boiled before adding to the preserve.

Release bubbles: Tap the base of the jar several times on a towel-lined surface to agitate the contents and release the bubbles before firmly securing the lids and placing in the water bath.

Bottling rack: This is placed in the stock pot to keep the jars off the bottom and avoid cracking. Alternatively, you can use a dish towel.

Bottling tongs: These are handy specialised tongs designed to lift hot jars safely out of the stock pot once the processing is complete.

For more information visit the following website:

- National Center for Home Food Preservation: nchfp.uga.edu
- Fowlers: fowlersvacola.com.au
- greenlivingaustralia.com.au

> **See recipes over page**

Simple recipe for bottling plums

This recipe highlights the raw pack method, where the plums aren't cooked before packing into jars. These are backfilled with water instead of a syrup.

What you need

Deep coloured ripe plums that are still firm
500ml jars
Boiling water

1. **Prepare the plums.** Remove stems, wash the plums, and prick the skin of whole plums twice with a fork to prevent splitting. If you prefer, halve the plums and remove the stone (there's no need to prick halved fruit).
2. **Prepare the jars.** Wash jars and lids thoroughly, and rinse.
3. Temper the jars by running them under the hot water tap (plug the sink). Gradually increasing the temperature to prevent cracking.
4. **Pack the jars.** Pack plums tightly into the jars, leaving 13mm of headspace (the gap between the height of the plums and the very top of the jar ring).
5. Pour boiling water into the jars, maintaining the same headspace. Remove air bubbles by gently tapping jars on a towel-lined surface.
6. **Seal and process.** Wipe jar rims, secure the lids, and place jars in a stock pot of water preheated to 80°C. Bring the water to a full boil. Boil jars for 20 minutes at sea level, adjusting for elevation as needed (see previous page). Set the timer the moment the water boils and remove the jars the moment the timer goes off.
7. **Cool and check seals.** Remove jars with bottling tongs and place them on a towel to cool. Check for vacuum seals once cooled. Unsealed jars can be reprocessed or refrigerated and eaten within two weeks.

This recipe is from Fiona Weir Walmsley who loves to share the joy of the homegrown food, made with the fresh produce from her farm in Gerringong, NSW.

Preserved peaches

Hello summer!
January is when I put up peaches. It's possibly way more fun than it sounds, and seriously, those glorious golden jars of summertime on the shelves in my pantry just make me happy. There's an earnestness about preserving, a feeling of won't-run-out or okay-if-the-zombie-apocalypse-comes. We can lock the door and eat through the pantry shelves before we're zombied. If that's even a verb.

I highly recommend it. It's pretty straightforward. Sterilise some jars, drop fruit into boiling water, peel the skins off, take out the seed, cut them up, pack them into jars and pour boiling sugar syrup over the top. Screw on the lids and process in a hot-water bath (I use my stockpot with a cake rack in the bottom) for 20 minutes.

Golden jars of sunshine; they make everything peachy.

Makes 3 × 1 litre (4 cups) jars

880g (4 cups) white sugar
1 litre (4 cups) water
2kg fresh ripe peaches (Free-stone! Not cling-stone!)

1. First, get a large pot of water on the stove to boil (this is to blanch your peaches in) and wash your peaches.
2. Preheat the oven to 150°C (300°F). Lay jars on a tray in the oven for 15 minutes to sterilise. Put lids in a bowl and pour boiling water over them.
3. In a saucepan on the stove, stir the sugar into the water over a low heat. Let it simmer but not boil. The sugar needs to fully dissolve – this is your syrup. Take it off the heat and leave it aside for now.
4. Get a bowl of cold water ready – I use cold tap water and refresh it every couple of batches of peaches.
5. With a sharp knife, mark a cross at the bottom of each peach.
6. Blanch the peaches, five or six at a time, in the boiling water for 1½ minutes. Then transfer to the cold-water bowl.
7. Start the next five peaches in the boiling water while you peel the blanched peaches.
8. The skins should come off easily, unless they're unripe – that'll be trickier, use a knife if

PHOTO: ALAN BENSON

necessary. Place the peaches in a bowl once peeled and, once all are peeled, cut them in half, remove the pits, then cut again into quarters.

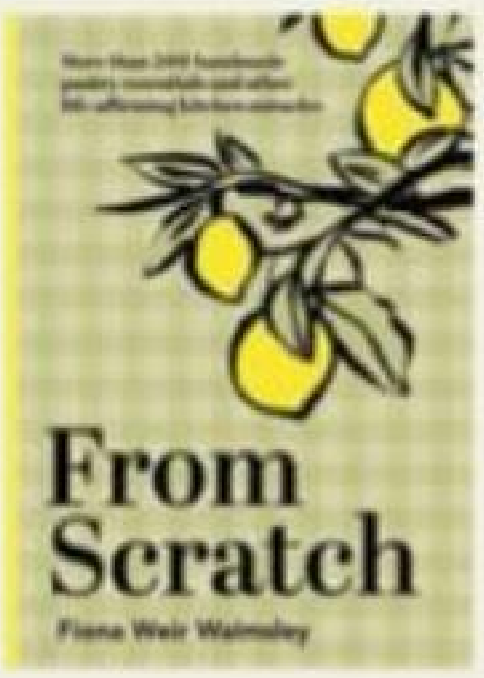
9. Add the peach pieces to your jars and layer them tightly until the jars are full, leaving about 3cm of space at the top of the jars. If you've got a random half-jar at the end, I recommend just eating them rather than processing a half-full jar or a smaller jar in among larger ones.

10. Pour the syrup into your jars until the fruit is covered by 10mm or so, leaving about 20mm between the syrup and the lid. Wipe the jar rims with a clean cloth dipped in boiling water.

11. Remove the air from each jar as far as possible. Gently bump the jar on the bench, or swish around a knife in the jars if needed. Fit the lids on, with Fowlers Vacola clips, or if using two-piece Ball Mason jars, tighten each lid to finger tightness and place the jars in a water bath canner or large pot, sitting on a round cake rack off the bottom of the pot if possible, or on a folded tea towel. You don't want the glass to be right on the bottom of the pot. You also want to avoid the water boiling too rapidly as it might knock the jars around and break them.

12. Bring the water bath to a boil and once the water is boiling, process the jars for 20 minutes, making sure they are fully submerged.

13. Carefully remove the jars from the water bath using tongs and let them rest on a tea towel on your bench. Allow to cool for 12–24 hours before moving. If any lids are not concave and pressurised, keep that jar in the fridge and enjoy in the next two weeks. Your bottled peaches will last well in in your pantry for one year, at least.



This is an edited extract from *From Scratch* by Fiona Weir Walmsley, photography by Alan Benson (Hardie Grant Books, $48).

Ready, set HARVEST!

Phil Dudman explains how to maximise your summer fruit crop and flavour, and reduce pest damage.

As we head into summer, the promise of juicy, homegrown fruit ripening on our trees, vines, bushes and brambles is a gardening reward well worth the wait. Preparing your orchard now can help you make the most of your summer harvest, whether you're growing mangoes in the tropics, apricots in warm temperate zones, or apples in cooler areas. Here's a straightforward guide to the most important summer prep tasks.

Watering and mulching

- Keep soil evenly moist around your fruiting plants to support fruit swelling; deep watering is best.
- Top up mulch where necessary to maintain a 5–7cm thick layer that will lock in moisture and help prevent weeds. Any organic mulch such as straw, sugarcane or wood chips will do. Avoid piling mulch directly against the trunk to reduce risk of rot.

Thinning fruit

- Lighten the load on branches by thinning out excess fruit on apples, plums, peaches and pears.
- Focus on removing smaller, irregular fruit or clusters. As a rule, aim for one fruit every 10–15cm (5cm for plums).
- Thinning also leads to larger, healthier remaining fruit, and removes hiding places, which means fewer pest issues.

Pest and disease management

- Regularly inspect plants for pests, such as aphids, scales, mealy bugs and diseases. Also keep an eye out for fungal spots and powdery mildew.
- Remove visible pests by hand or apply an organic insecticide, such as horticultural soap or oil sprays. On hot days, spray oils in the cool of the late afternoon and wash off the next morning to avoid burning foliage.
- Remove diseased foliage and spray remaining leaves with a suitable organic fungicide.
- Collect damaged and diseased fruit from trees and those that are on the ground. If left in place, these may spread the pest or disease to future crops. Bag and bin them.

Bird and animal protection

- Net fruit trees (especially figs and stone fruits) to prevent damage from birds and possums.
- Use wildlife-friendly netting with mesh that is 5mm by 5mm or smaller when fully stretched to prevent animals and birds getting entangled.

MANAGING FRUIT FLY AND CODLING MOTH

- In affected regions, use pest exclusion nets over tree canopies, small sleeves around fruit clusters or bags over individual fruit to protect them from fruit fly.
- Manage codling moth on apples and pears, removing loose bark and dead wood where larvae hide. Inspect fruit and remove those that have tiny holes and frass caused by larvae. Put them in a bag in the sun to kill the pest.

PHOTO: ISTOCK

Nurturing young gardeners

Costa Georgiadis is passionate about getting kids into gardening and has plenty of ideas on how to do it. He's also just written the first of a children's book series, *Costa's Garden: Flowers*, to get them inspired.

Costa Georgiadis– the host of ABC *Gardening Australia* – spent a lot of time when growing up watching and learning in his grandparents' garden. They had emigrated from Greece and used permaculture techniques in their garden before the concept was created. They had vegies and flowers, ducks, geese and chickens, orchids and a love for nature. He'd see his grandmother picking posies of sweet peas and want to do the same, and take them home to his mum. From his own experience, getting kids involved is how to get them started.

In a recent podcast with Charlie Albone (see next page for link), Costa shared ideas for how to do this. Even if you live in an apartment, Costa says there are ways kids can get the gardening bug: take them out into nature for a bushwalk, visit a local community garden, or see what's going on at their school. Is there a garden where you can volunteer with your child?

"You just need to get them started, even if just planting some flowers in a small pot and watching them grow," Costa says.

He says if you find a community garden, the regular gardeners will want to share their knowledge, so get the kids asking questions: what's that plant and what's it like to eat? Take photos of plants to look at and talk about. Even have an exercise book for notes and drawings. You can always visit a botanic garden, but then go back a few weeks later to see what is different, what's in flower.

The idea is to not just go to a destination where the children are purely entertained but develop a connection to places with activities they can take part in.

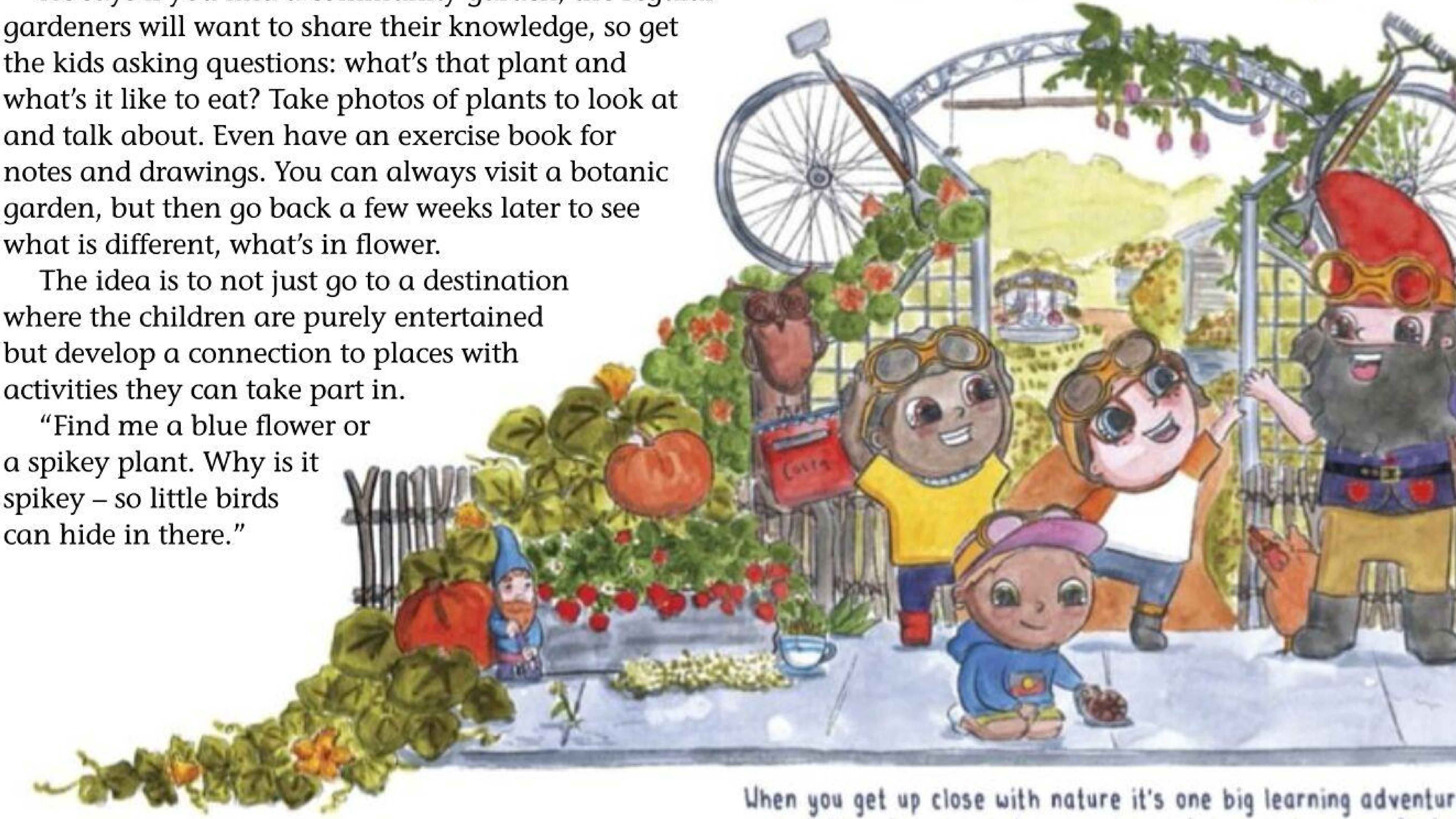
"Find me a blue flower or a spikey plant. Why is it spikey – so little birds can hide in there."

If you have your own outdoor space, you could start making plans, perhaps a small butterfly or sensory garden.

Costa's book is another way to get children interested. It is beautifully illustrated by Brenna Quinlan, who's done work for magazines (including *OG*), many environmental organisations and for Costa's first adult book *Costa's World*.

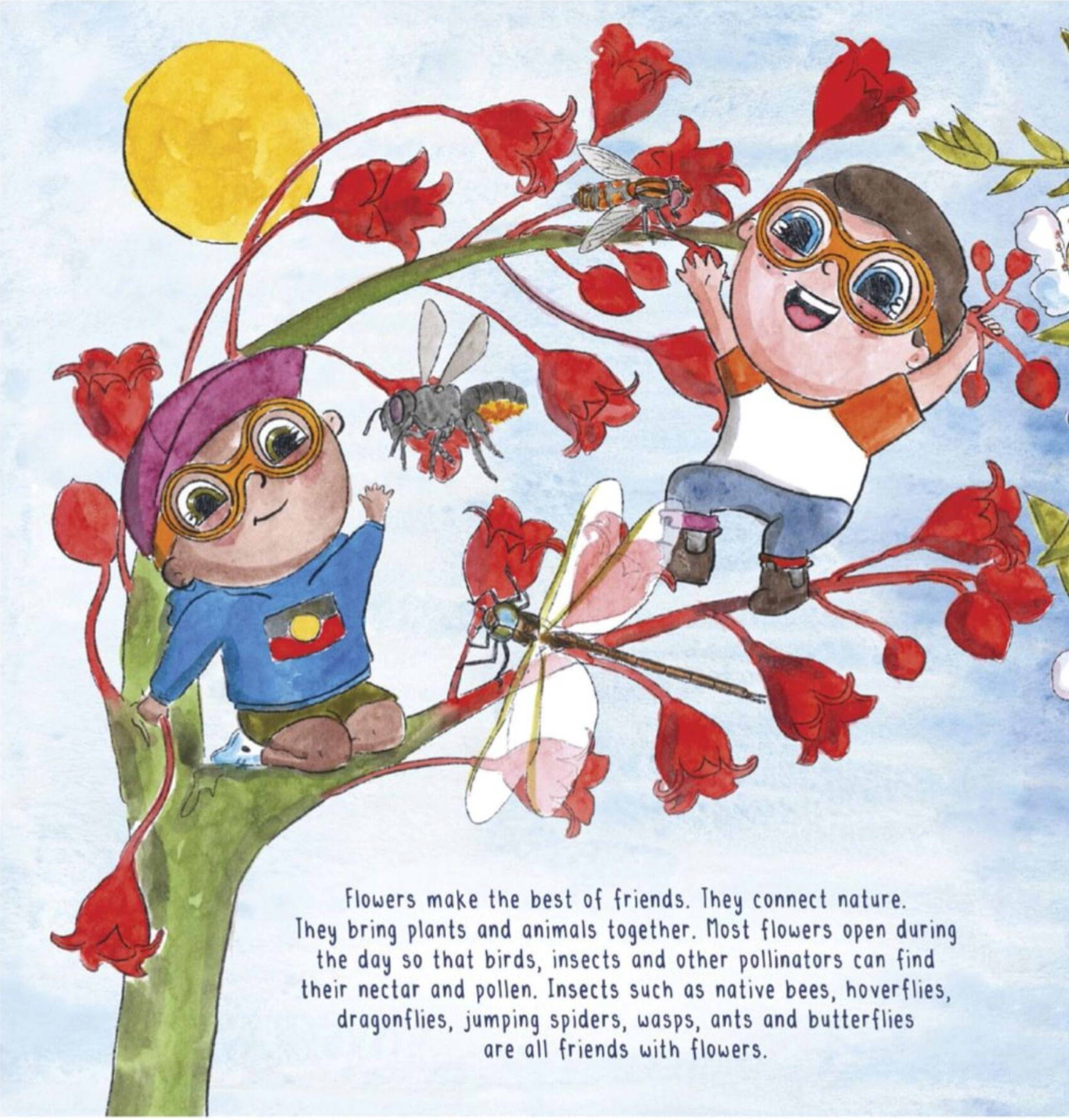
"Nothing makes my heart sing more than to interact with children," Costa says. "Sharing stories with children is a privilege for me. It's an opportunity to encourage engagement with the world, to inspire kids to put their nature goggles on and to see, smell, touch, listen and taste the world."

Turn the page for a snippet of Costa's new book!



Hi, I'm Costa and welcome to my garden.
I love exploring and learning about nature.
It's a place to slow down, be patient and observe
how everything is connected.

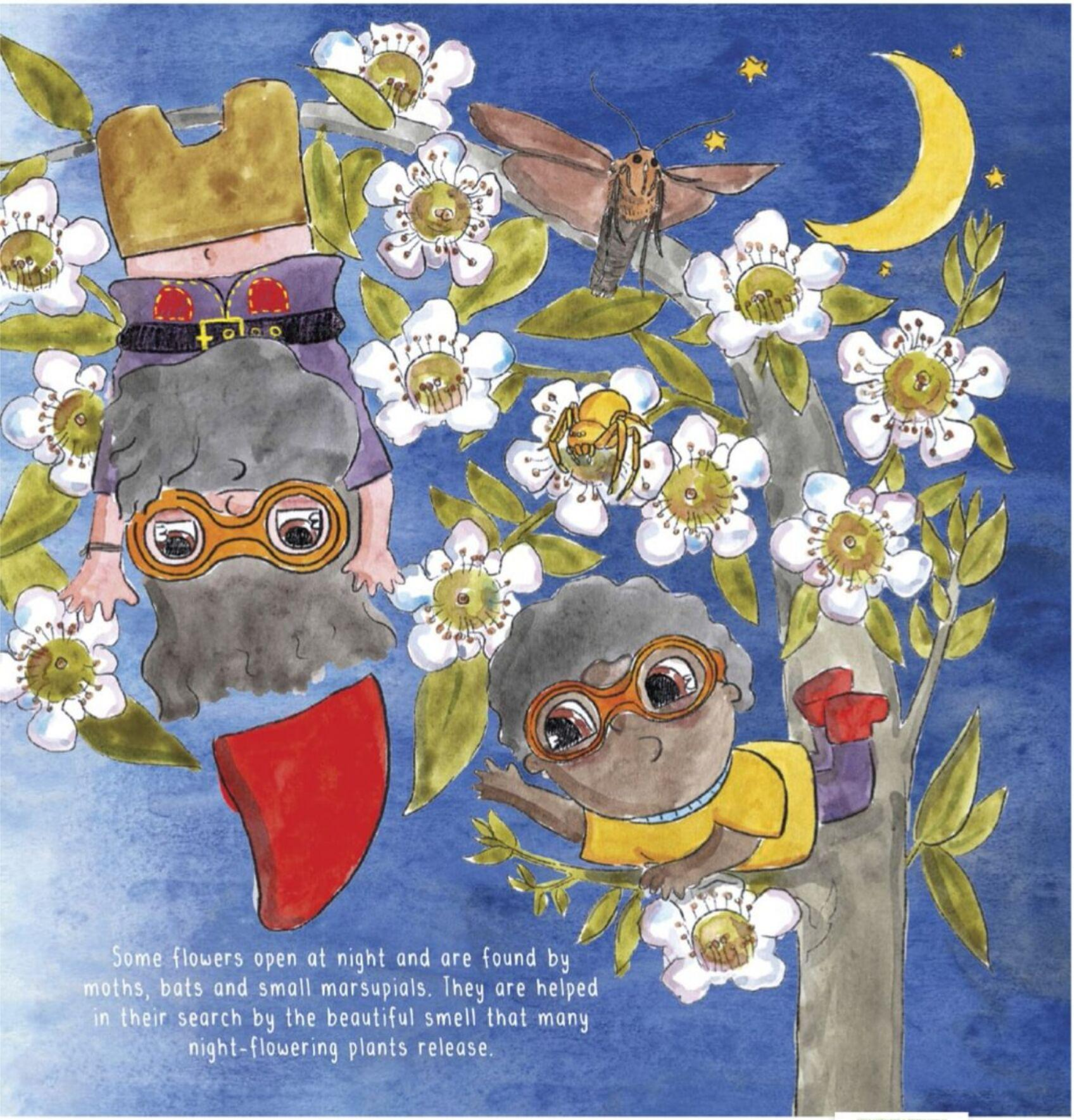
When you get up close with nature it's one big learning adventure,
so let's put on our nature goggles and see what we can find.



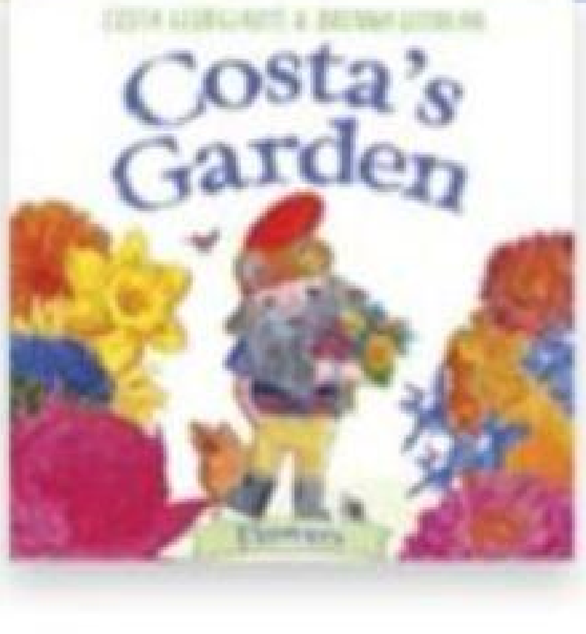
Flowers make the best of friends. They connect nature. They bring plants and animals together. Most flowers open during the day so that birds, insects and other pollinators can find their nectar and pollen. Insects such as native bees, hoverflies, dragonflies, jumping spiders, wasps, ants and butterflies are all friends with flowers.

Further inspiration

- Watch Costa on ABC *Gardening Australia Junior* and Get Grubby TV here: iview.abc.net.au.
- Listen to the full interview by Charlie Albone at https://pod.link/1585582915



Some flowers open at night and are found by moths, bats and small marsupials. They are helped in their search by the beautiful smell that many night-flowering plants release.

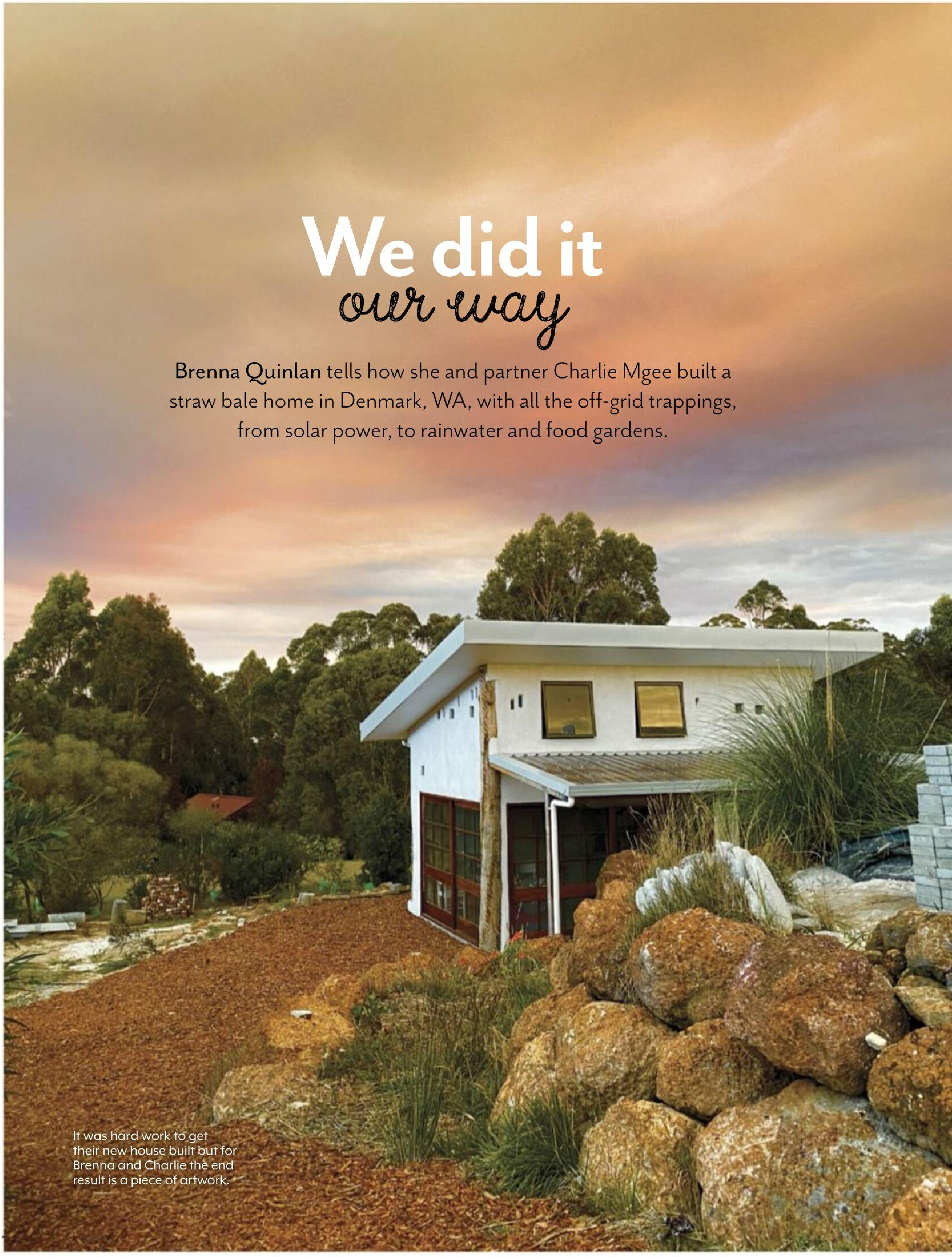


Costa's Garden: Flowers by Costa Georgiadis and Brenna Quinlan, published by ABC Books, is available now in bookshops and online.

IMAGES FROM COSTA'S GARDEN © COSTA GEORGIADIS AND BRENNA QUINLAN, ABC BOOKS 2024

We did it
our way

Brenna Quinlan tells how she and partner Charlie Mgee built a straw bale home in Denmark, WA, with all the off-grid trappings, from solar power, to rainwater and food gardens.



It was hard work to get their new house built but for Brenna and Charlie the end result is a piece of artwork.

I'm in my early 20s, stuffing tortillas and peanut butter into my mouth on a dusty roadside in Nicaragua. I'm 10,000 kilometres into a bicycle trip that began in Canada and ended much further south. This trip turned my entire world upside-down.

All of a sudden, I was meeting people who lived differently. Folks who grew food, who lived in a community, who were generous with what little they had. People who were trading their time and skills for a place to live. People who had built their own homes from the earth. People were doing things differently, but who were happy.

Six years later, I returned to Australia with an Argentinian accent and some big ideas.

I found a place where I could work one day a week in exchange for a place to live, and we grew most of our own food so life was cheap. I was surrounded by people of all ages living for free, or for very little, offering dog minding, gardening help, or even just company, in exchange for a room, a studio, a place to park a tiny house. The irony was that, after four years of living and advocating for cheap housing, I'd saved up enough money on my precarious artist's income to buy a block of land, albeit in Western Australia.

We got our land for cheap – $150,000 for a quarter acre block, because our block sits in an intentional community. I suppose intentional communities aren't all that desirable to most people (because: people), but for my partner Charlie and me it was a dream come true.

A new home

Peace Street Community became our home. We parked our small, hand-built house-truck in the forest, built a compost toilet, and made a plan.

Initially, I was convinced that building a home was utter madness and should be avoided at all costs. I have since been proven right. In those early days of 2021, we explored house relocations in lieu of building. Unfortunately, a very steep hill and too many powerlines stood between us and all of the sensible options, and so the house-building journey began. We decided on a straw bale house design.

I had a vision of house building. It would be mostly groups of people, smiling with clay on their faces and straw in their hands, rendering and laughing in the sunshine as barefoot children ran around, squealing in delight. In reality, we spent the first year knee-deep in mud, shouting directions over the hail at various heavy machinery operators as they dug ponds, terraced our south-facing slope, and installed an eye-watering amount of underground drainage to divert the springs that generously grace our property.

Brenna and the house slab with the studio at the back.

Below: Applying clay render to the straw bale walls.

PHOTOS: BRENNA QUINLAN

WHY GO STRAW BALE?

We chose to build a straw bale house for several reasons, including the following:

- It is local, unlike hemp, which is often imported from France.
- It's a waste product, chemical-free, and it's compostable at the end of its life, unlike standard building materials.
- It's one of the best insulators available, exceeding many commercial products.
- It's fire safe – setting fire to a rendered straw bale wall is like burning a phone book.
- It creates a beautiful home with rounded doorways and deep sills.

They used clay from the site to make the render.

Left: Making the light earth walls for the studio.

Rescue and re-use

Channelling our inner magpies, we collected piles of dusty timber from people's sheds. We rescued huge jarrah logs from a farmer's firewood pile, which became the posts for our studio. Our local glass shop was clearing out their warehouse, and gave us all of our double-glazed windows for almost nothing, and we adapted our house plans to fit them.

Charlie salvaged a huge marble benchtop for the kitchen, and sliding French doors and a spiral staircase for the studio. We got pallets of used form plywood to make future cupboards, and scored a wood stove for $200 bucks.

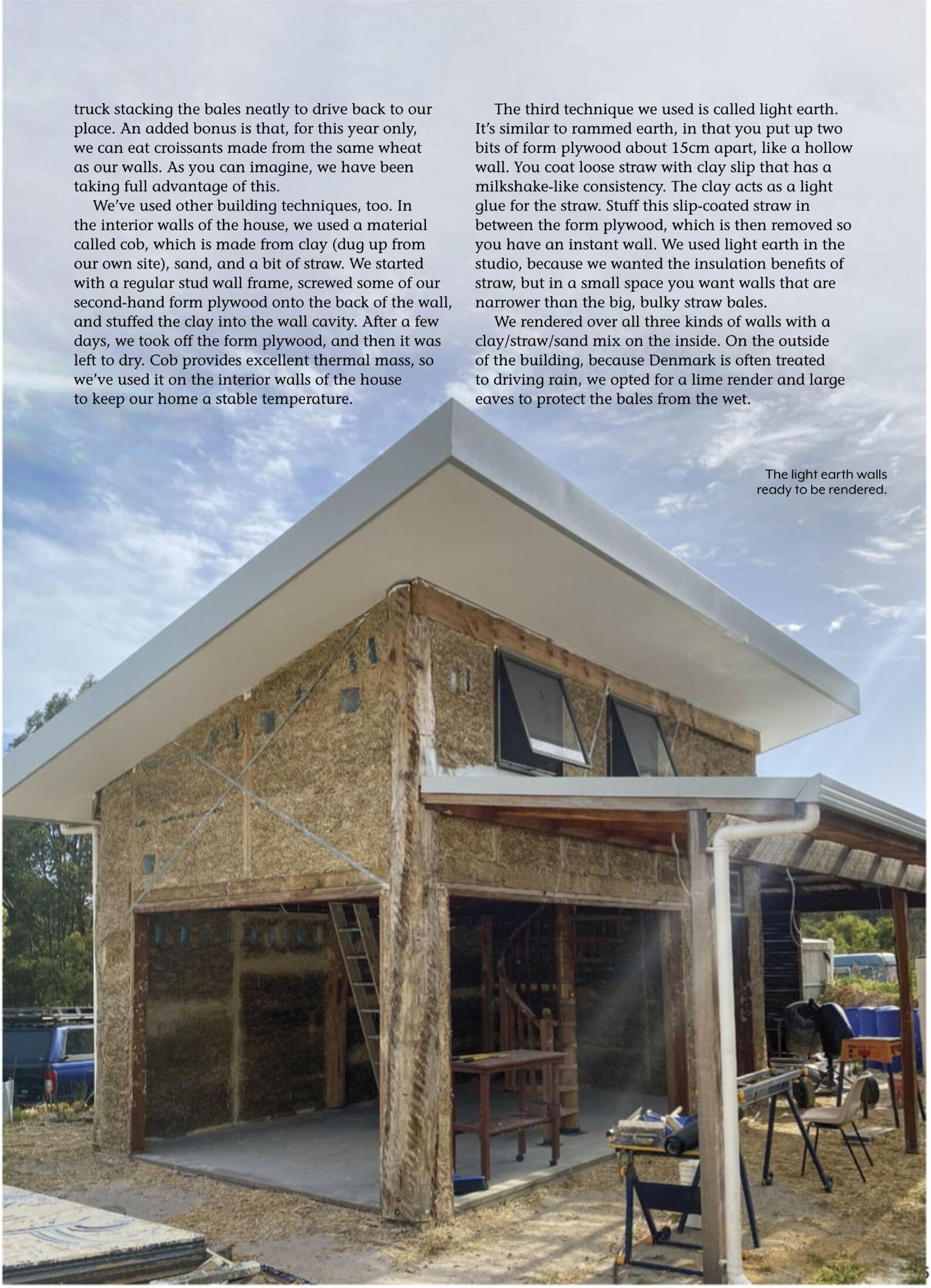
Owner builder's luck would have it that we were forever unloading these precious yet heavy and awkward items in just the spot that needed to be cleared the following week.

Our mates at Goodies Farm, who are our local regenerative grain farmers, grew us a special crop of wheat straw, which we picked up in December, 2023. We actually went out to the farm on harvest day, and as they bailed up the straw in the field, we were on the back of the truck stacking the bales neatly to drive back to our place. An added bonus is that, for this year only, we can eat croissants made from the same wheat as our walls. As you can imagine, we have been taking full advantage of this.

We've used other building techniques, too. In the interior walls of the house, we used a material called cob, which is made from clay (dug up from our own site), sand, and a bit of straw. We started with a regular stud wall frame, screwed some of our second-hand form plywood onto the back of the wall, and stuffed the clay into the wall cavity. After a few days, we took off the form plywood, and then it was left to dry. Cob provides excellent thermal mass, so we've used it on the interior walls of the house to keep our home a stable temperature.

The third technique we used is called light earth. It's similar to rammed earth, in that you put up two bits of form plywood about 15cm apart, like a hollow wall. You coat loose straw with clay slip that has a milkshake-like consistency. The clay acts as a light glue for the straw. Stuff this slip-coated straw in between the form plywood, which is then removed so you have an instant wall. We used light earth in the studio, because we wanted the insulation benefits of straw, but in a small space you want walls that are narrower than the big, bulky straw bales.

We rendered over all three kinds of walls with a clay/straw/sand mix on the inside. On the outside of the building, because Denmark is often treated to driving rain, we opted for a lime render and large eaves to protect the bales from the wet.



The light earth walls ready to be rendered.

Going off-grid

The Straw House is self-sufficient as follows:

Rooftop solar and hot water

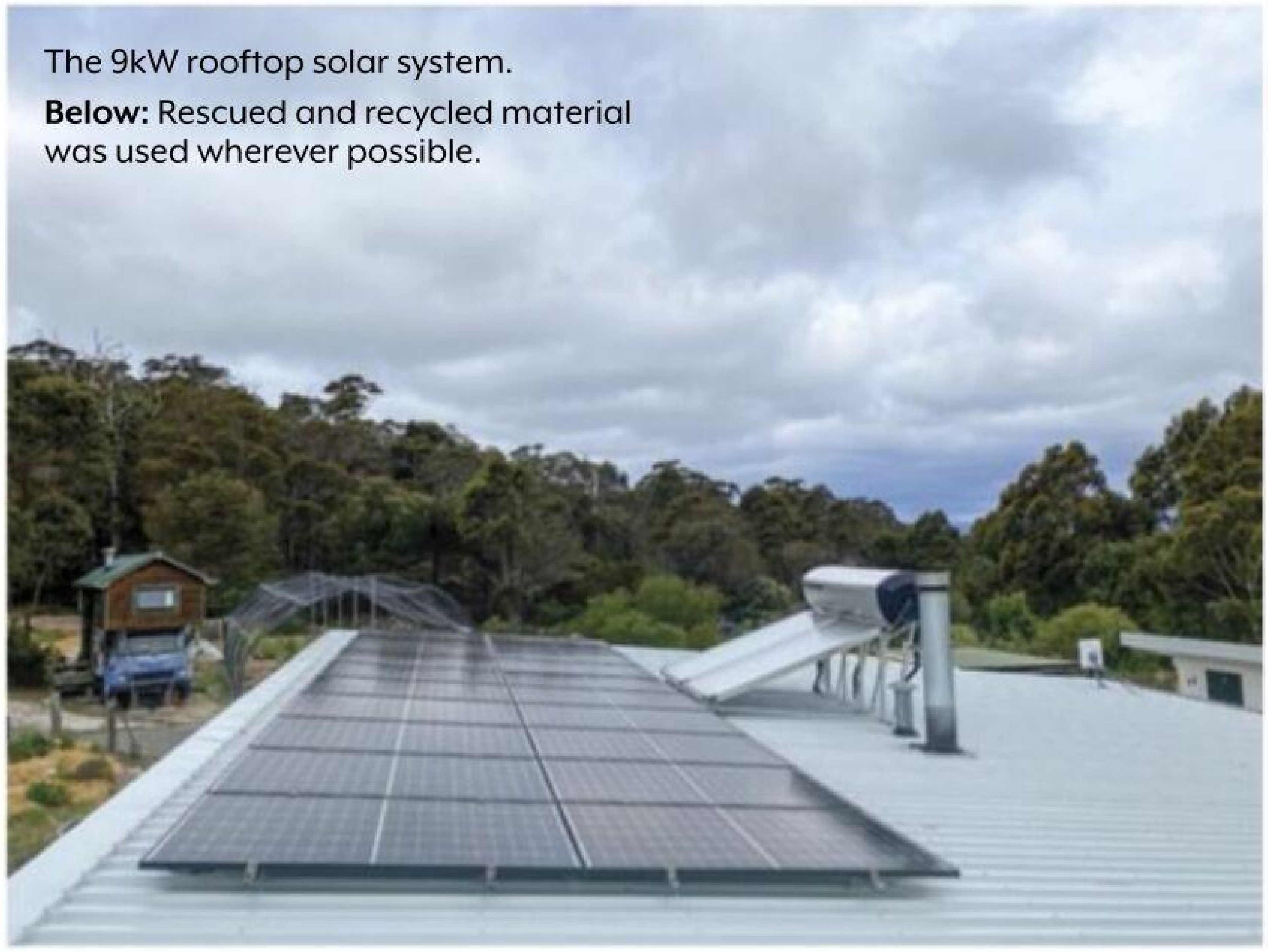
We have a 9kW rooftop solar system, inverter and 9kWh of batteries. We have solar hot water with a solar-powered electric booster. A wood stove also heats water, so it stays warm on rainy winter days when we're trying to conserve power.

Rainwater and compost toilets

We use rainwater and in a rare example of commonsense bureaucracy, our community by-laws insist on compost toilets. We process wastewater with a three-bathtub system that cleans the water and sends it down a trench to the fruit trees.
For irrigation water, our community draws from a spring-fed dam, which is sent to a header tank by a solar pump, and gravity feeds down to each lot.

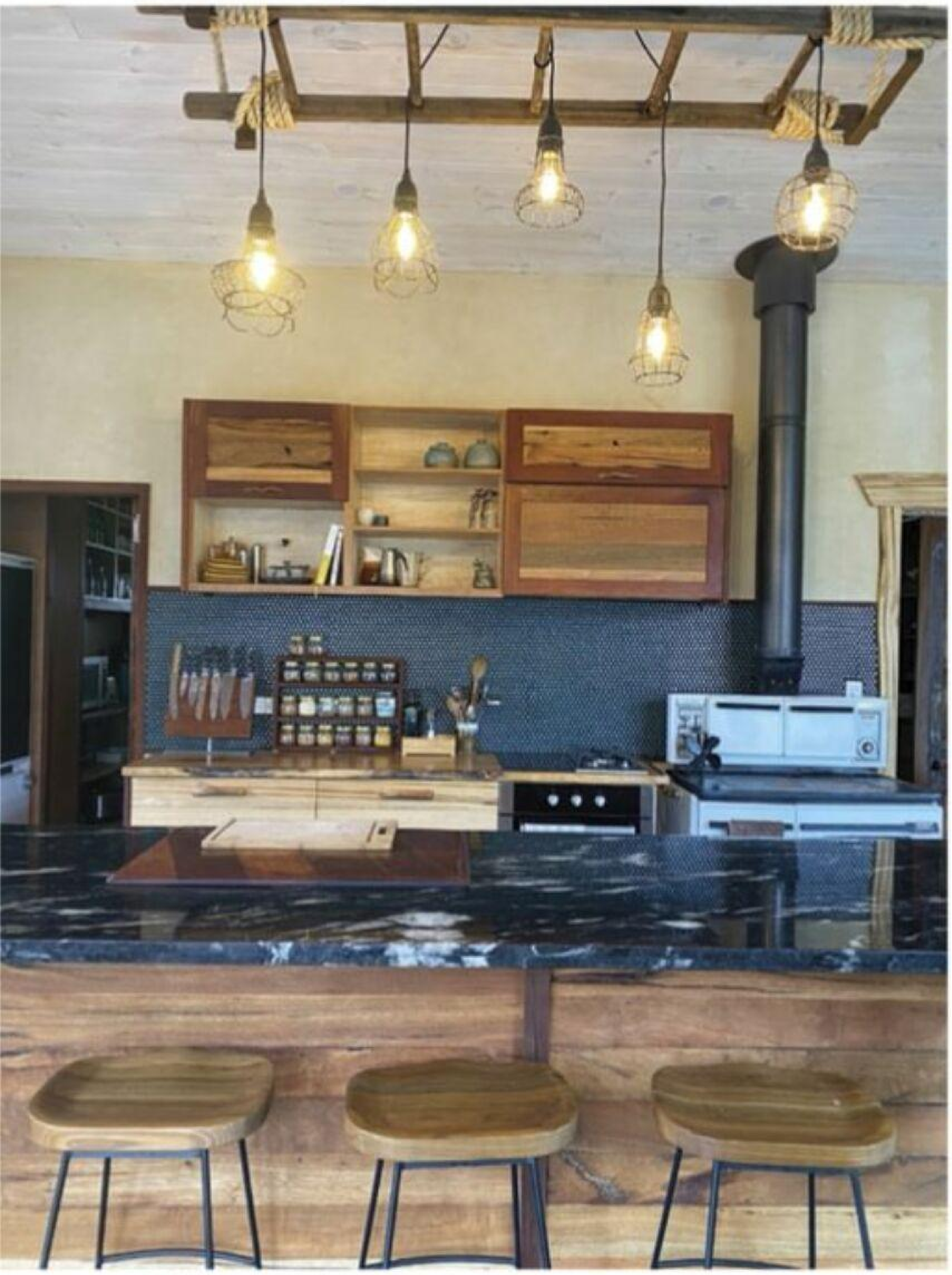
Sharing and caring

By living in a community, we can be off-grid in many ways. We borrow ladders, wheelbarrows, utes and drills from each other, and share excess seedlings and preserves. We have no centralised garbage collection so we minimise waste. We're only 2km from town, but we have so much of what we need here.



The 9kW rooftop solar system.

Below: Rescued and recycled material was used wherever possible.



Clockwise from top: The marble benchtop in the kitchen was salvaged by Charlie; the common land next to their property is managed using permaculture principles; the rendered walls.

COMMUNITY SUFFICIENCY

Our house is situated on Peace Street Community in the town of Denmark, in the south western most bit of Western Australia. The community consists of 18 quarter-acre house lots, and 50 acres of common land – mostly karri, marri, tingle and jarrah forest, as well as dams, ponds, gardens and orchards. My block is next to ¾ of an acre of common land, which we manage by the permaculture principles (which happen to be included in our aforementioned sensible community by-laws).

We have terraced the south-facing slope, built a food forest on large hügelkultur beds, created a spring-fed chain of ponds, built a netted orchard and vegie gardens. There is also a fire pit on a buffalo grass lawn for community gatherings, and we have put in over 1000 flowering, fire-retardant native trees and shrubs, all gifted, propagated or grown from seed, to enhance our block's biodiversity.

Feeling expansive

Charlie and I spent almost four years of the build living, working and putting up with each other in a 2 x 5m one-room, tiny house. Charlie, of band Formidable Vegetable, recorded his latest album in a mouldy abandoned caravan in the bush, and I illustrated my latest children's book (created with Costa Georgiadis) from our bed while Charlie's band rehearsed in the tiny house next to me.

We are used to small spaces, so our humble two-bedroom home feels extravagant. But now, my ferments have a place on the pantry shelf, not on the house-truck floor. We have a fridge slightly larger than a postage stamp. For the first time in years, I have a desk to draw at. The house is warm in the evenings and cool on sunny days. It just works. I wake up thinking, 'Not only did we build something, but we did it our way'. It wasn't the easiest or the fastest way to build, but in the end this house feels like an artwork. Sculpted from clay with our own hands, and with those of our community. It has what we need, and nothing more. It's beginning to feel like home.

King Island conserver

Steve Payne visits family on King Island in the Bass Strait, where he discovers an extraordinary conserver, Kate Armstrong, whose land containing endangered species is protected by covenant in perpetuity.

Kate Armstrong looking out over her forest conservation area.

When I was a kid, my family on my dad's side was very far flung. We lived on a wheat, sheep and cattle farm in north-western New South Wales outside of Gunnedah. My aunt and her family lived in Broken Hill. Then way down south was an uncle and aunt, with five kids, farming on King Island in Bass Strait. It was the time of expensive air fares, slow trains and cars without air-conditioning, so getting together was rare.

I visited King Island for the first time when I was 18 and I loved it. You fly there from Tasmania or Melbourne – the latter now around a 30-minute trip – and if you are lucky with clear skies, get a good impression of the length and breadth of it.

The island sits off the western tip of Tasmania and is just over 1000sq km with a population of around 1600. It is becoming increasingly popular for ecotourism, especially with bird lovers (see 'More Information' box on next page).

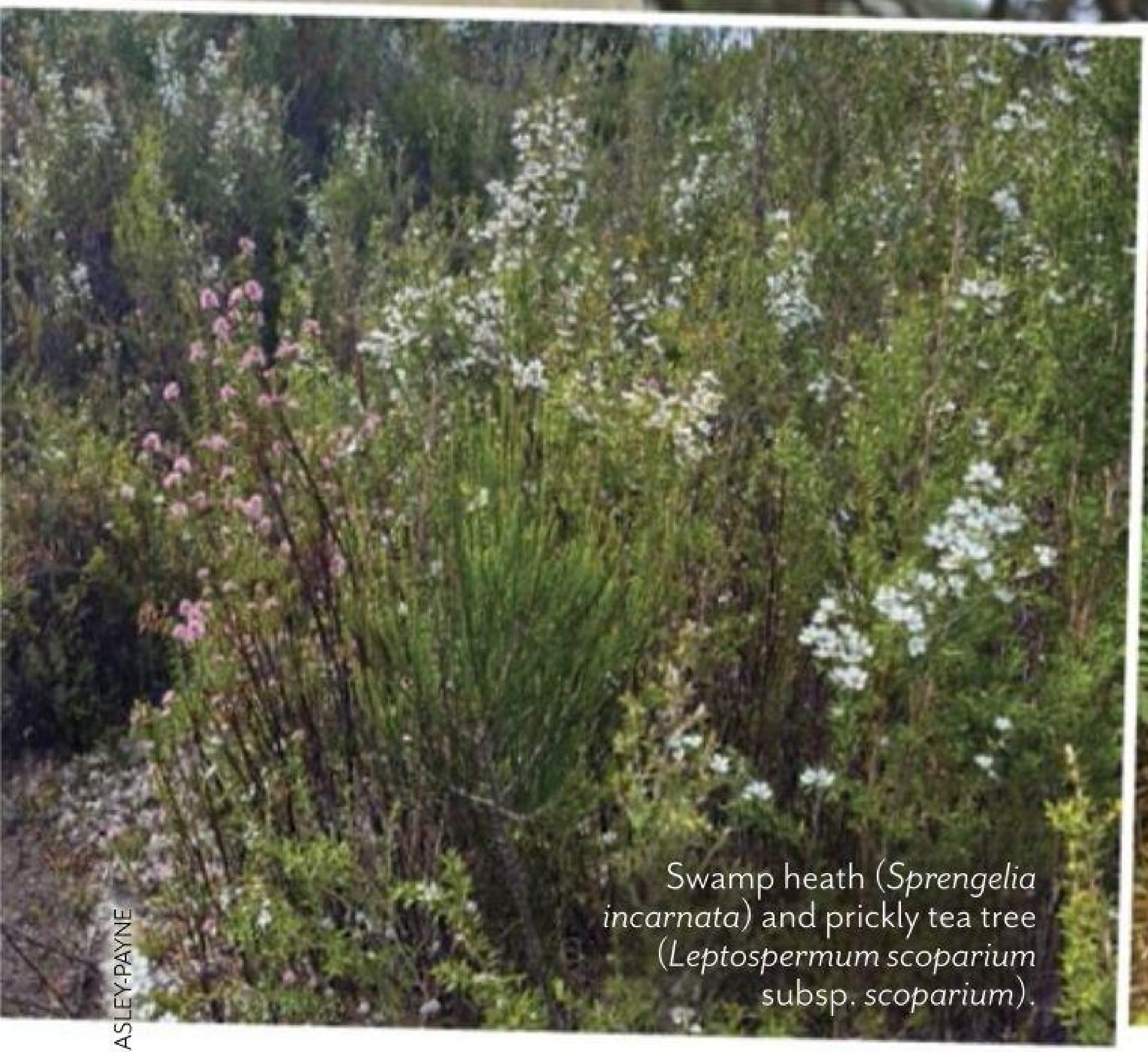
Early this year, I went back with my now 18-year-old daughter to reconnect with family. Three of my cousins still live there. Cousin Jenni Payne took us to see some of the island's wild, natural beauty, such as a meeting with a sea lion on a beach walk. She also told me about conservation projects on the island and introduced me to Kate Armstrong who has been doing amazing work conserving a large area of forest on her property. Kate took us on a walk through her forest, showing a deep knowledge and love of the wildlife, the natural habitat and King Island as a whole. Then we sat down back at the house with a cuppa to talk some more.

Steve: What brought you to King Island and what do you love about it?

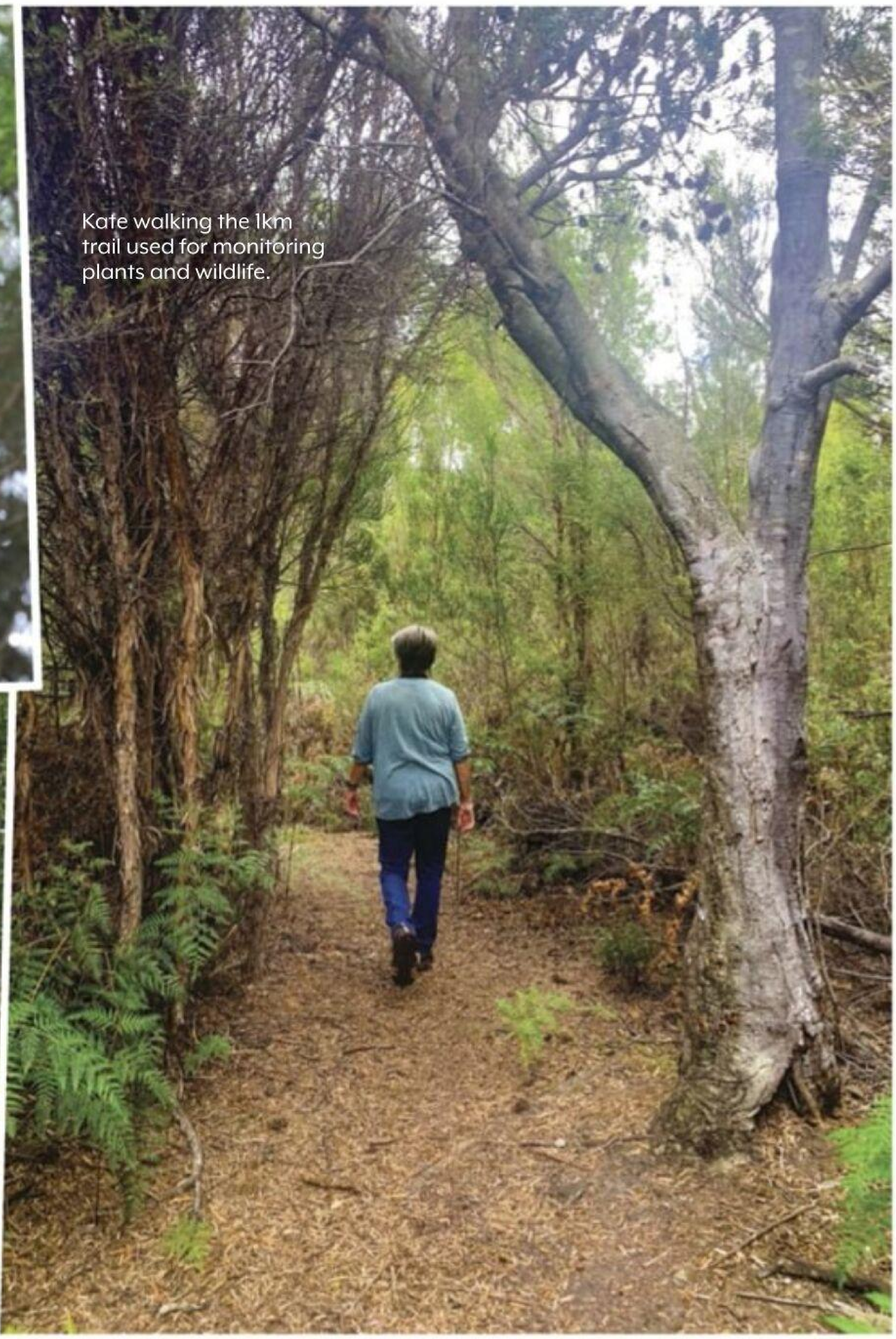
Kate: My late husband and I bought a place to retreat to from Sydney in 2004. We had previously holidayed on the island and fallen in love with it then. Since his death I spend about 7–8 months here and only about

PHOTO: BILLIE BEASLEY-PAYNE

King Island green rosella.



Swamp heath (*Sprengelia incarnata*) and prickly tea tree (*Leptospermum scoparium* subsp. *scoparium*).



Kate walking the 1km trail used for monitoring plants and wildlife.

PHOTOS: TOP LEFT: ANDREW SILCOCKS/ BOTTOM LEFT: KATE ARMSTRONG /FAR RIGHT: BILLIE BEASLEY-PAYNE

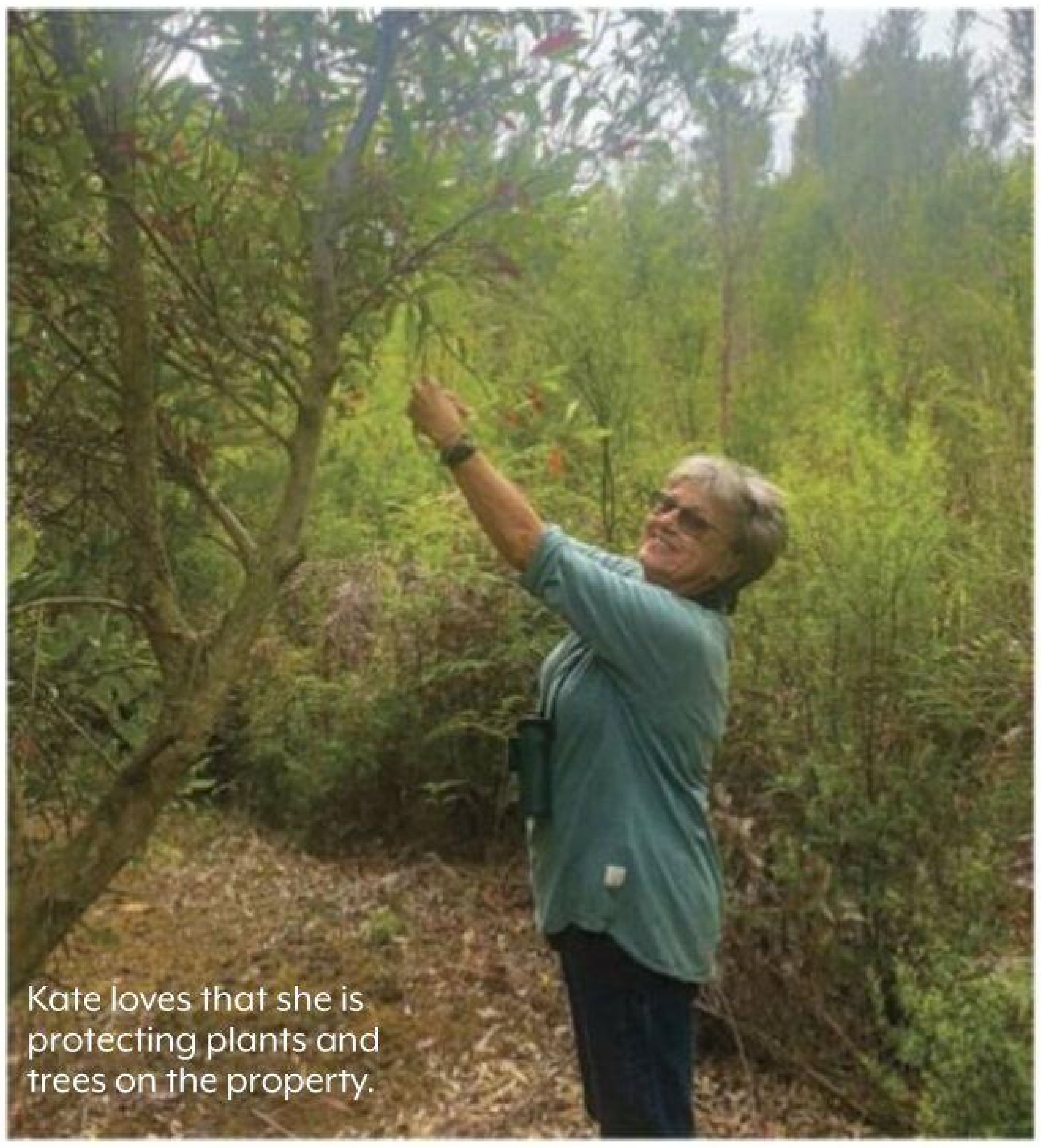
4–5 in Sydney. I love its remoteness, the clean freshness of the air and water, the wildlife, the scenery and its strong community. And I love my place – the forest and wildlife, and the view out to Bass Strait.

We bought the property on condition that it was covenanted, which suited us. I have worked in bird conservation for many years, knew about covenants and was delighted to have the opportunity to be guardian of 500 acres of pristine forest on King Island. There is very little left of this pristine forest – it is a wild area. In 2007 there was a major bushfire which burnt about 80 per cent of my property, and a great deal of the adjoining state reserve. We were lucky in that it was a cool fire for us, although a very hot one in other areas causing significant long-term damage. But for us, in the end, the fire was rejuvenating for the undergrowth and didn't kill many large trees. I don't need to do much to keep it safe, other than keeping bulldozers and people away from it.

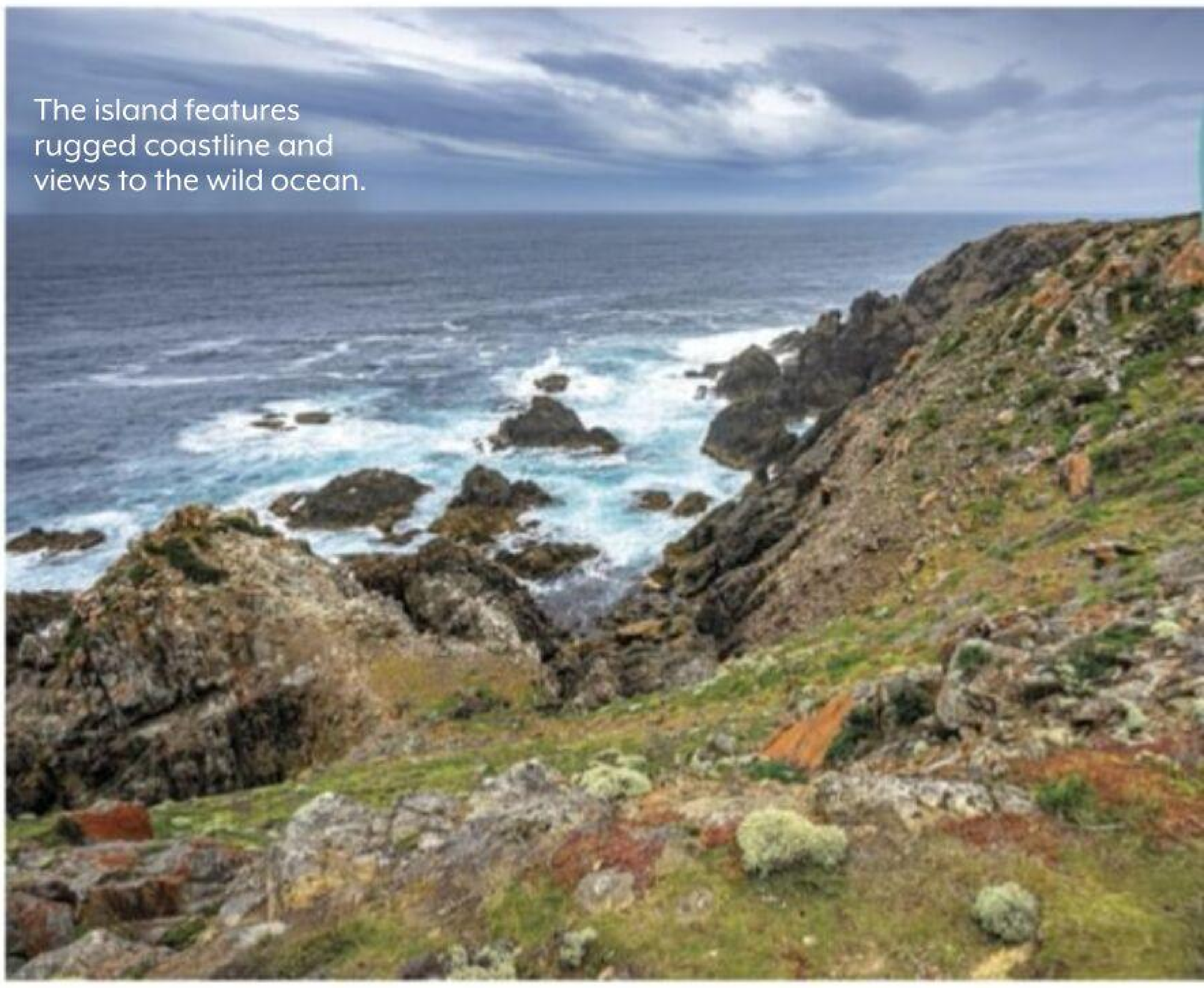
Steve: Why is King Island wildlife and vegetation so important to protect?
Kate: King Island has been isolated from the mainland for over 10,000 years since Bass Strait was inundated at the end of the last ice age. In many ways it acts as a biological stepping stone between the mainland and Tasmania.

There are a number of endemic species on the island that have evolved here. These include nine endemic birds that are subspecies of Tasmanian birds, but also birds from the mainland, such as the golden-headed cisticola, that breed no further south than King Island, and are only occasionally observed in Tasmania as vagrants.

The King Island platypus is more closely related to the Victorian platypus than the Tasmanian. Some species that were here are now extinct such as the diminutive King Island emu and King Island wombat.



Kate loves that she is protecting plants and trees on the property.



The island features rugged coastline and views to the wild ocean.

Steve: What makes your land unique?
Kate: It was identified for covenanting because it had several threatened species living on it. These include plants quite common on mainland Australia but living no further south than King Island, such as bootlace bush (*Pimelea axiflora* subsp. *axiflora*), Austral mulberry (*Hedycarya angustifolia*) and blueberry ash (*Elaeocarpus reticulatus*) the latter also being found on Flinders Island but not Tasmanian mainland.

Threatened wildlife include the endemic King Island brown thornbill that is considered the next most likely avian extinction in Australia – but we are working hard island-wide to prevent that.

Other endemic King Island subspecies of the Tasmanian endemic birds, including yellow wattlebird, green rosella, dusky robin and black currawong, all reside on the property, as well as many others. Marsupials include Bennett's wallaby, pademelon also known as rufous wallaby, eastern pygmy possum, long-nosed pottaroo and echidna.

Steve: How much work has it taken and what have you done over the years to conserve the area?
Kate: No significant outside help has been received to conserve the area. I and some friends opened a narrow 1km-long track immediately after the fire so that monitoring can occur. I have trapped wildcats and now host a Felixer feral cat grooming apparatus, and through Wings on King program and my personal efforts, monitor the birds on at least a quarterly basis. Post the 2007 fire we maintained photo points for some time.

Steve: What do you see as the future for your land and the conservation area?
Kate: When I die, it will be sold but as it is covenanted in perpetuity the next owners will also have to maintain it as a wild refuge. There are 10 acres not covenanted, where the current cottage is, that they can play with as long as what they do does not impinge on the covenant.

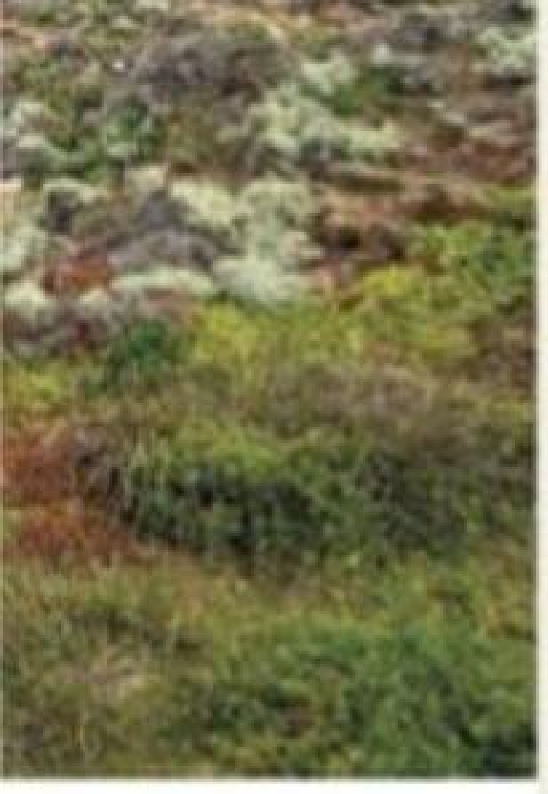
I hope it will go on into the future, but climate change will have, and is already having, a profound impact. Since the King Island drought in 2023–4 many of the tree ferns have died and this season isn't looking much better. So, I would predict that the current areas of wet eucalypt forest will open up into dry eucalypt forest and the vegetation will change.

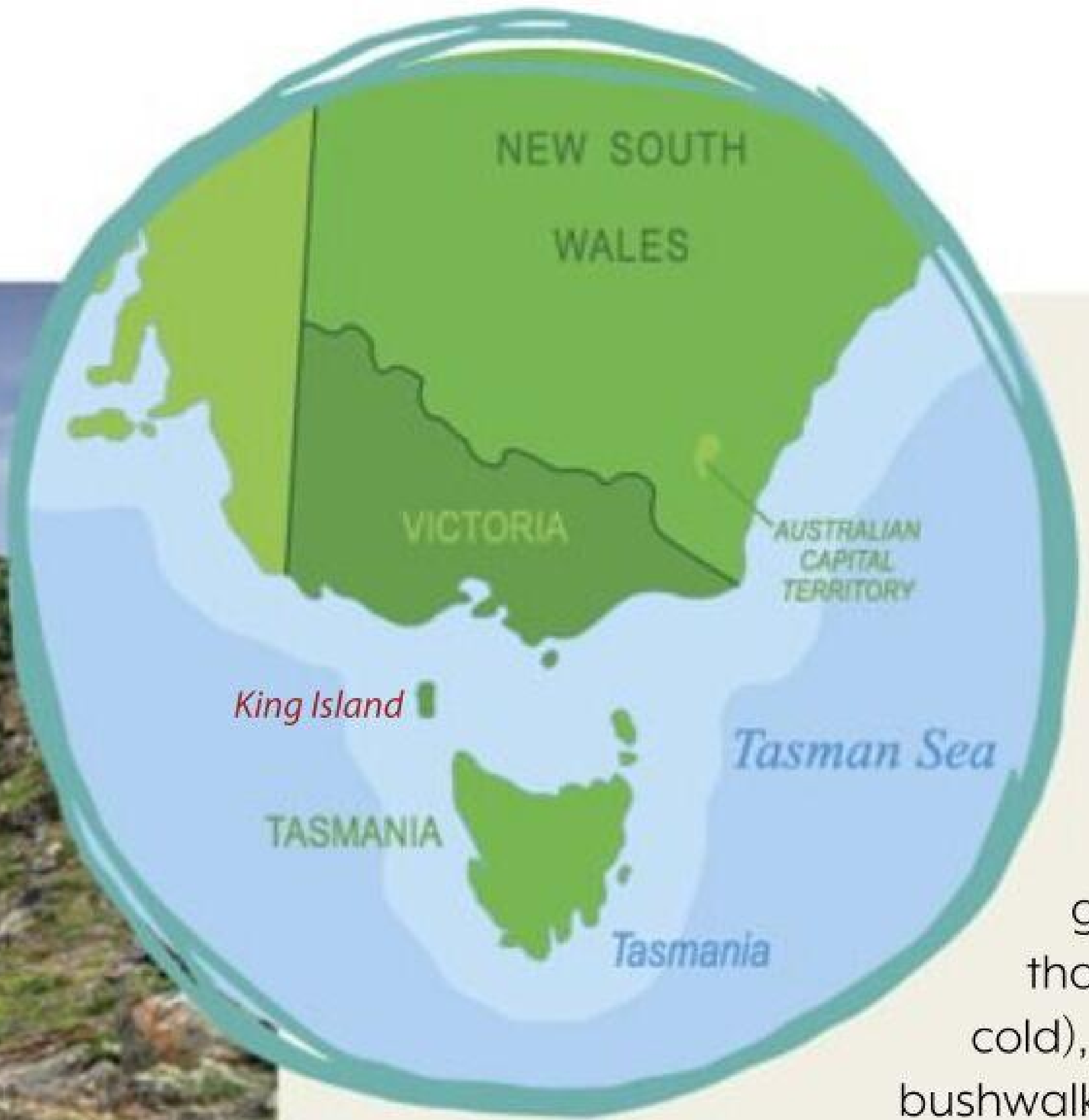
Climate change is occurring so rapidly and its full impacts are unknown. We can only hope that what lives here now is able to continue.

MORE INFORMATION

- B.O.K.I. (Birds of King Island) is a small, informal group of local volunteers who are passionate about birds. The website has recently been transferred to the King Island Landcare Group who run their Wings on King bird monitoring project through it. This is an important project that both promotes sensitive and ethical bird tourism by education and collects bird data to monitor the long-term sustainability of King Island. It welcomes and encourages people to visit and assist with this data collection. Visit: birdsofkingisland.com

PHOTO TOP LEFT: BILLIE BEASLEY-PAYNE/ABOVE: ALAMY





all about KING ISLAND

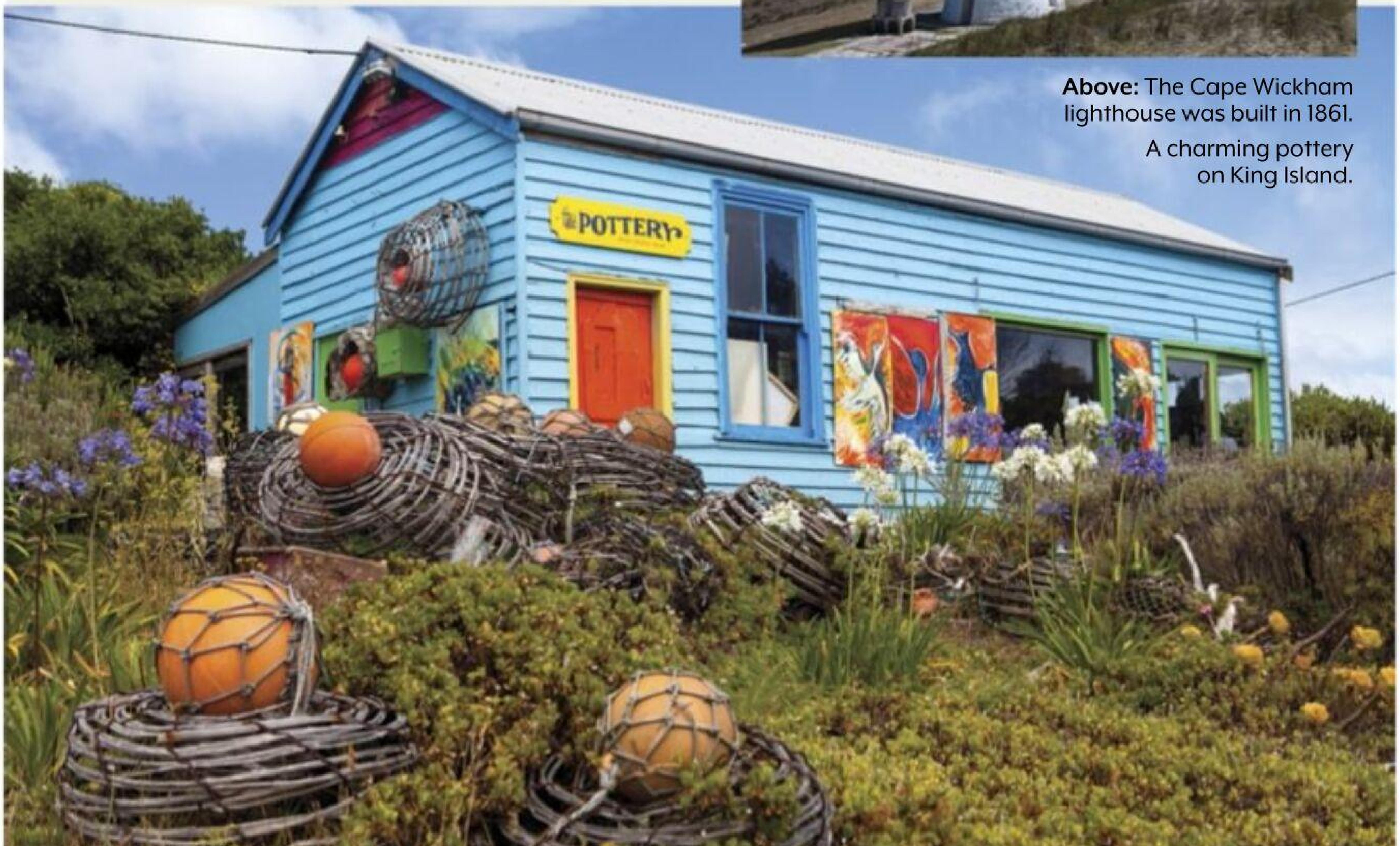
King Island is small but unique, with rugged coastlines, walkable beaches, great surfing (for those who brave the cold), nature reserves, bushwalks, and great food such as local crayfish. There is also the King Island Brewhouse and King Island Distillery creating handcrafted bespoke spirits. Alas, the much-loved King Island Dairy recently closed.

Getting there: You need to go by air. Flights are available to King Island from the Burnie Wynyard airport, as well as Launceston, Hobart and Melbourne (around 35 minutes). There are three airlines: King Island Airlines, Rex and Sharp Airlines. Once there, you can stay cosy in your accommodation, join a guided tour or hire a car to explore.

Where to stay: There is an increasing range of options, including bed and breakfast, hotels and motels, and self-contained eco accommodation. The latter includes:

- **Buttons by the Beach** 100 per cent off-grid using solar and wind energy and batteries, with zero reliance on mains infrastructure. It offers stunning views of King Island's rugged west coast and the untamed beauty of the Southern Ocean. buttonsbythebeach@gmail.com
- **Kittawa Lodge** Award-winning luxury, Kittawa Lodge is situated on a stunning, secluded, ocean-front, 96-acre property. It comprises over 750m of coastline, lush 12,000 year old grassy sand dunes, private valleys, forested nooks and natural-spring dams. It is also completely off grid. kittawalodge.com
- **For more information** on the island, how to get there and where to stay: kingisland.org.au

Above: The Cape Wickham lighthouse was built in 1861.



A charming pottery on King Island.

PHOTOS: ALAMY/MAP: ISTOCK

The troublemakers

Georgia Angus looks at the birds that can devour our fruit and drive out smaller desirable birds, and how we can help the latter with diverse habitat.

Red wattlebirds and currawongs (inset) can drive smaller birds away.

PHOTOS: ISTOCK

Usually our goal in the garden is to grow nourishing food, and to draw beloved birds and other wildlife to our backyards. However, sometimes the resources we provide in gardening – flowers, fruit, water, and useful habitat are exploited by species we don't want. Noisy miners, common mynas, red wattlebirds, ravens, currawongs, and a number of other species can make it difficult to maintain a productive garden, and they often scare off the backyard birds we do want.

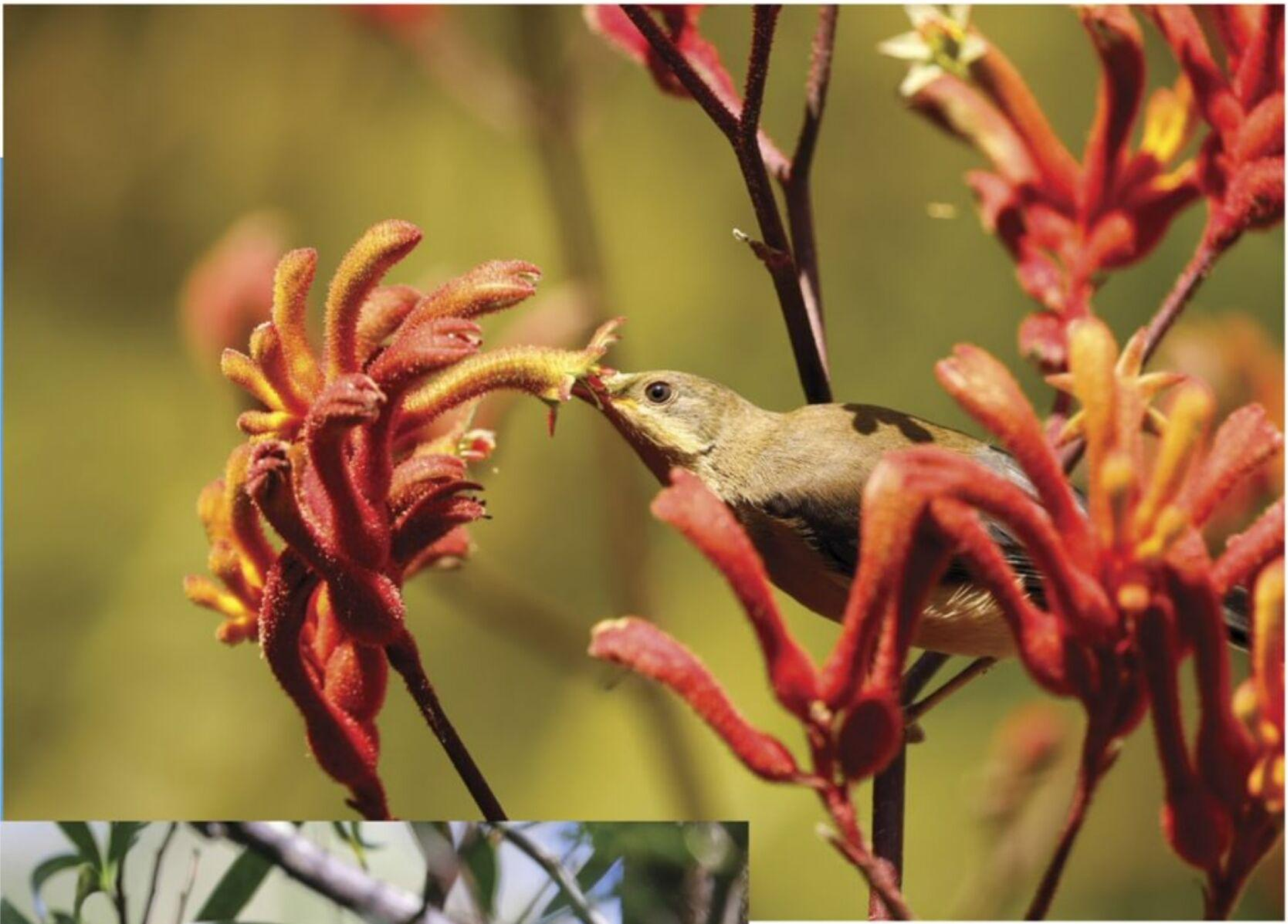
I've had plenty of days where, in frustration, I've gone outside and thrown sticks at noisy miners and pied currawongs that are using the 'little bird' bath.

While this may feel cathartic, it's fleeting, as they are not deterred easily. What's needed are long-term ways to manage 'tricky' species, and, more importantly, focus on what we want: a better balance of species in our garden.

Varied habitat

I always keep in mind that an excess of aggressive birds in an area is not simply a matter of imbalanced species populations, but a result of habitat change. The habitat destruction humans enact in the process of forming suburbs and cities massively favours aggressive species. Culling or relocation efforts are usually temporary. The most troublesome species take advantage of open lawns fringed by remnant or landscaping gums, or sparse urban areas where they can aggressively defend their territory.

To restore balance, we need to think about tipping the scales in favour of the little birds. The goal should be to create lush and varied habitat, including a maze of thickets, provide safe access to water, and abundant insect life for food. In this way, we slowly disadvantage aggressive birds. These smaller, desirable birds, can be resilient when we provide



PHOTOS: GEORGIA ANGUS/FLAME ROBIN: ISTOCK.

Top: A juvenile eastern spinebill.
Above: Male flame robin.
Left: The tiny superb fairy-wren.

> The goal should be to create lush and varied habitat, including a maze of thickets, provide safe access to water, and abundant insect life for food.

Netting to save fruit

When it comes to produce-raiding species (for example, common mynas, rainbow lorikeets), one of the most effective things we can do is to net fruit trees and canes with bird-safe netting (with a mesh size that is 5 x 5mm or less at full stretch, ideally with cross-weave). There are plenty of methods for netting, including whole-tree netting or 'sleeve' netting, where we net only fruit bearing branches of a tree. These are useful and effective ways to ensure we safely protect our harvests. Another tactic some orchards use is to have a 'sacrificial' fruit tree that is left unnetted to draw wildlife away.

Prickly and dense bushy plants offer shelter for small birds: (foreground clockwise from left) rosemary grevillea (*Grevillea rosmarinifolia*), *G.* 'Firesprite' and *G. lanigera* 'Mt Tamboritha'.

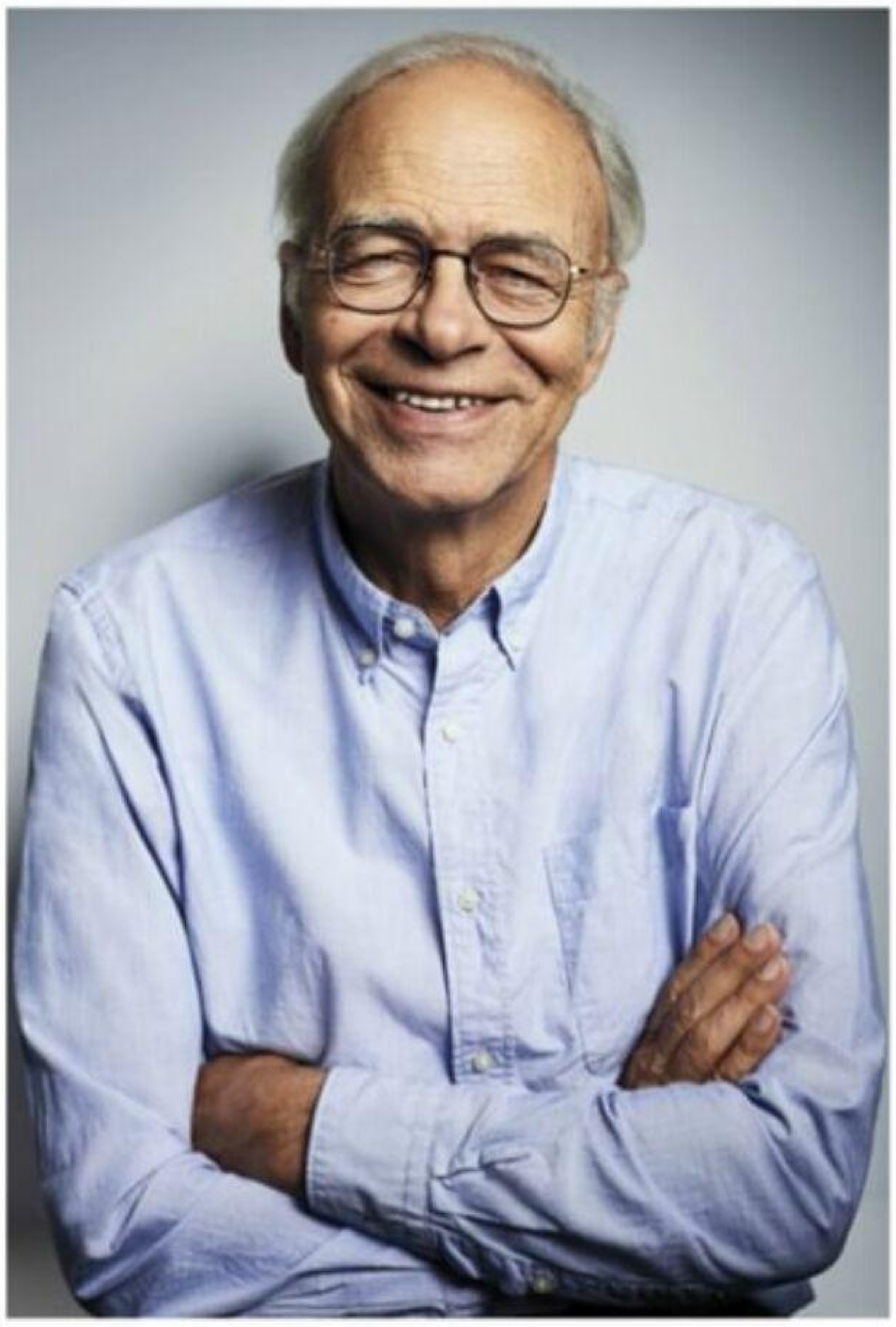
them with the right conditions. They can then thrive even in the presence of troublesome birds.

The birds we want

Little backyard species to encourage and support include fairy-wrens, thornbills, scrubwrens, robins, weebills, silvereyes and spinebills. Providing the habitat needed in your backyard and in collaboration with neighbours, and with the wider community, schools and councils, requires thought and planning. Here are a few guiding principles:

- Plant thick, dense cover for little birds, preferably without large flowers. Little birds don't need to get far to get away from big birds, they just need something close and dense so they can escape easily. Try dagger hakea (*Hakea teretifolia*) and other prickly hakeas, sweet bursaria (*Bursaria spinosa*), prickly currant bush (*Coprosma quadrifida*), spiky dense wattles (e.g. prickly Moses or hedge wattle), native grasses, such as tussock (*Poa* spp.), mat rush (*Lomandra* spp.), wallaby grass (*Rhytidosperma* spp.) and kangaroo grass (*Themeda* spp.)
- Create layers in your garden, from the protection of local old-growth trees to medium, low-story shrubs, down to grasses – and the soil beneath the grasses. Embrace a bit of chaos and overgrown areas (perfect little bird habitat), and try to break up lawn spaces with plants.
- Promote insect life (including a frog pond for aquatic larval insect stages, and by mulching and looking after your soils).
- Support local habitat by promoting dense shrubby understory in the surrounding areas. This will better support your local little birds, and disadvantage bigger bully birds. This can be joining your local Landcare or 'Friends Of' group, or taking the initiative by speaking to your neighbours about creating some low, dense habitat corridors along your street.
- Be patient and think ahead. It takes a few seasons for shrubs to provide habitat, so try and think about how you want your garden to look in a few seasons time. Be patient with your garden – changes will come, if you start planting now.

PHOTO: PHIL DUDMAN/ILLUSTRATION: ISTOCK



In conversation

PETER SINGER

OUR PLANET AND OTHER ANIMALS

Has the ethical treatment of animals improved in the last 50 years? And what will the next 50 look like for animals and the planet? **Simon Webster** finds out.

Philosopher Peter Singer is the author of the seminal animal rights book, *Animal Liberation*, which was published in 1975 and republished in an updated version, *Animal Liberation Now*, in 2023. He is a proponent of veganism and effective altruism. His latest book is *The Buddhist and the Ethicist*, and he is a co-presenter of the podcast *Lives Well Lived*.

PHOTO: ALLETTA VAANDERING

Peter Singer fired up the conversation on the ethical treatment of animals back in 1975.

It's almost 50 years since *Animal Liberation* was published. How have the lives of animals changed in that time?

Well, unfortunately, you would have to say that they've got worse, if you're aggregating it, because there are more animals in factory farms now than there were. A big factor there is that China has become more prosperous, and people use their prosperity to buy more meat and animal products.

Here in Australia, things have improved a little bit in some respects, but only really around the edges. We're lagging behind the European Union,

> [Organics] is better for the environment, for the soil, and with Australian standards, it typically is somewhat better for animals. You really want to look at the individual farmers, and see what they're doing.

for example, and its protection of farmed animals. Yes, we've made some other improvements, and hopefully we're going to stop live exports shortly, but in terms of numbers, it's the chickens and the pigs and farmed fish that really we're inflicting the most suffering on.

Has the lack of progress surprised you?

It disappoints me, certainly. I didn't really know what to expect. On the one hand, I knew I was tackling a very large industry, and it would use all of its resources to defend what it was doing, and that also, it was hard to change people's habits about what they eat. But I did think that once people knew about how animals are treated in industrial farms, which I hadn't known myself just a few years before I wrote *Animal Liberation*, I thought once they knew, they would react as I did, and they would say, I can't be complicit in this. I can't support this by purchasing the products. So I thought there would be a bigger move away from factory farming.

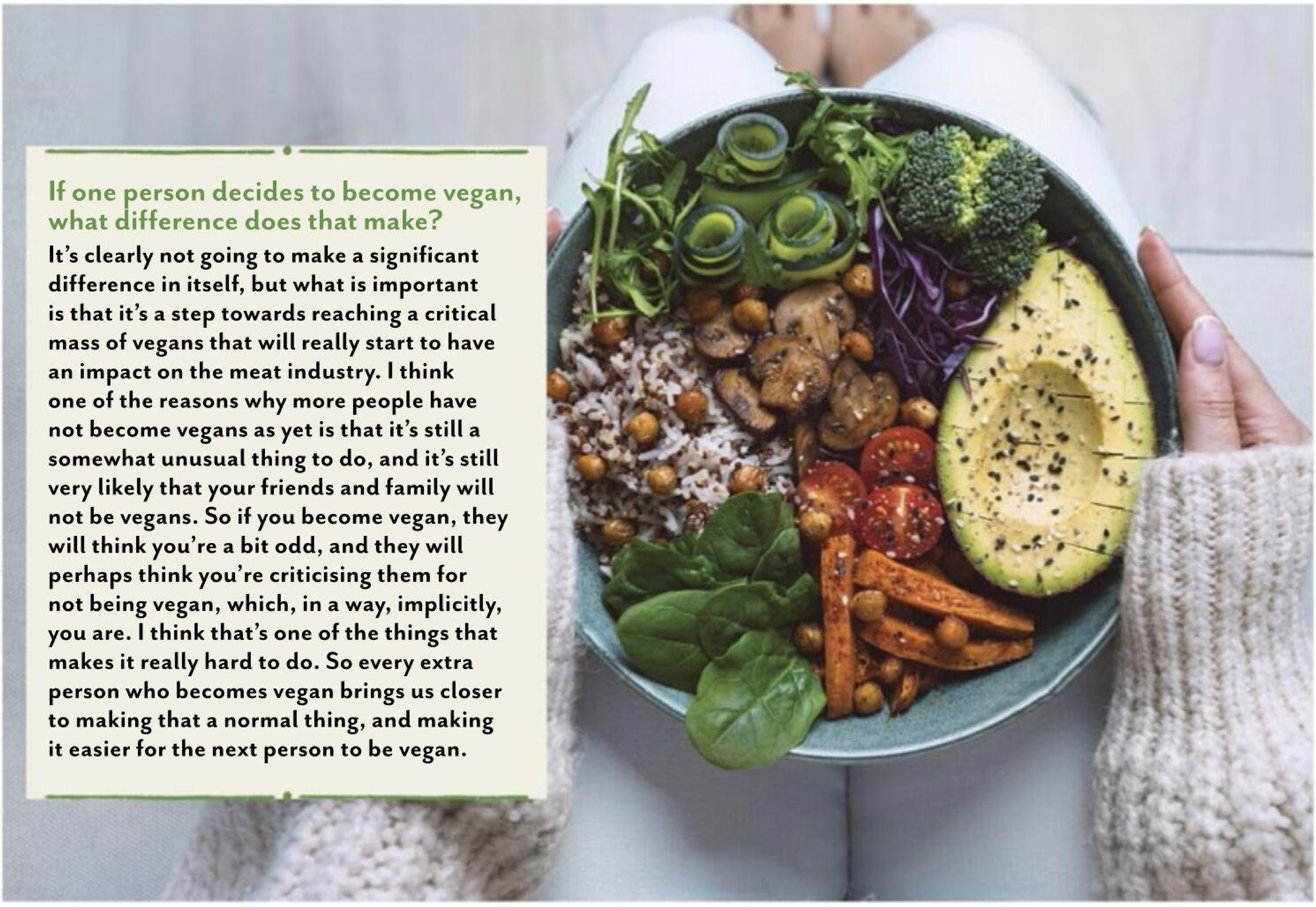
What do you think animals' lives will be like 50 years from now?

I hope there will be fewer of them, because we will have alternative ways of producing our food that don't involve factory farming. I hope we will be eating a plant-based diet, or if we're eating meat, it will be cellular meat – cultivated meat that will not actually involve a sentient being – and therefore, the hundreds of millions of animals who get raised from factory farming every year globally simply won't exist. That will be a good thing, because their lives are miserable.

And so there will be fewer animals, I hope, and they will have better lives. There may still be some animals produced by going back to allowing them out in fields, and wild animals will be better protected. We will have better means of stopping wildlife poaching, for example. I'm not sure what will happen to ocean fishing. I imagine some of that will still go on, but only if we actually protect the fish stocks, which, again, we're not doing sufficiently now.

How important a role can veganism play in combating climate change?

A significant role. I think for most people in affluent countries, about 20 per cent of their greenhouse gas emissions come from the animal products they're



If one person decides to become vegan, what difference does that make?

It's clearly not going to make a significant difference in itself, but what is important is that it's a step towards reaching a critical mass of vegans that will really start to have an impact on the meat industry. I think one of the reasons why more people have not become vegans as yet is that it's still a somewhat unusual thing to do, and it's still very likely that your friends and family will not be vegans. So if you become vegan, they will think you're a bit odd, and they will perhaps think you're criticising them for not being vegan, which, in a way, implicitly, you are. I think that's one of the things that makes it really hard to do. So every extra person who becomes vegan brings us closer to making that a normal thing, and making it easier for the next person to be vegan.

eating. And if we succeed in replacing fossil fuels for energy and to drive cars, then that 20 per cent will become, obviously, a much larger percentage, and may eventually become the dominant factor in the continued emission of greenhouse gasses, which, of course, we need to stop entirely. So I think people can make a big contribution by moving away from animal products.

Is there such a thing as ethical meat production?

I think ethics isn't a black and white thing. It comes in degrees… If you produce animals where they are able to have a life that suits their needs – you're talking about cows being outside on grass, in a social group that's the right size for them – that can be a reasonable life. And if you then don't transport them to slaughter, but you kill them on farm, I think that's far more ethical than what's going on in factory farming. If there are people who are conscientious omnivores in that way, I don't try to change them. I think they're already on the right side.

Do you regard organic production as more or less ethical than conventional?

It's definitely more ethical. It depends on the standards of organics, which vary in different countries. In the United States, for example, you can have an organic dairy farm that is still intensive, where the cows are still basically inside in sheds for most of their lives, but they're being fed on grain that's organically produced.

[Organics] is better for the environment, for the soil, and with Australian standards, it typically is somewhat better for animals. You really want to look at the individual farmers, and see what they're doing.

What's more important: bringing people out of poverty now or fixing climate change for future generations?

They're both things we should be doing, and we can do both. But I'd have to say that climate change is the bigger issue, because if we don't fix climate change, we're going to have more people in poverty in future years as the climate changes.

More severe weather events, including more severe droughts and more severe floods, is going to be worse for people in poverty. They're the ones who have the least resources to deal with those changes. So we have to give priority to climate change.

What's the secret to a life well lived?

I think it's having a purpose… having your values in harmony with what you're doing, and knowing that something you believe in and hopefully you've got right, is actually something that is contributing to make the world a better place.

Ingrid [Newkirk, the founder of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, whom Singer interviewed for the podcast *Lives Well Lived*] is a good example of someone who's been doing exactly that, and I think she enjoys it.

PHOTOS: ISTOCK

> I was a vegetarian for many years before moving towards being vegan. And I'm still not totally strict about it.

Ingrid has something to do. She has a purpose. She's not bored, she's not wondering what shall I do, like a lot of people are. She's not just focused on herself.

Just focusing on yourself, I think Buddhists are right about that, is not satisfying. It's ephemeral in a way. And I think there's much more to working for a purpose that's beyond yourself, that's bigger than yourself.

A lot of the people we're interviewing are living good lives like that.

What else can we learn from Buddhism?

There are some aspects of it I can't accept: beliefs in reincarnation, for example... And religion tends to corrupt things.

We talked in the dialogue about this practice of mercy release, a Buddhist idea that if there's a captive animal and you release it, and it can go back to its life in the wild, that's a good thing...

But religion turns it into an industry. So now in Buddhist countries there are people who are breeding animals in order to sell them to people who are then going to release them, which is crazy.

But in terms of thinking about how you live, recognising that we're here for a period of time, that things will change, that there are some things we can't change, but we can have compassion for all sentient beings – I think that's a key precept of Buddhism.

It's not always observed by Buddhists, but it's something that can give your life meaning and purpose. And the encouragement to meditation, I think, is something that also enables people to feel calmer and more satisfied and extend their compassion to others, too.

Should we extend respect for other species to insects, microbes, plants... ?

I don't think we have to extend it to microbes or plants at all, because I don't think they are sentient beings. There is some interesting work that's happened between the first and most recent edition of *Animal Liberation* about research on plants, but I still don't think it shows they're sentient beings.

Insects may be sentient. I'm agnostic about whether they are or not. So for that reason, I'm opposed to the farming of insects, which is being done now, mostly to be fed to animals but some of it for human food.

I think, given the very large numbers you have to produce, the possibility that they are sentient is enough reason to say, no, we don't need to do this. But am I going to sit there and let a mosquito bite me? No, I'm not.

What is the best way to try veganism? Just jump in the deep end?

I've had people say to me, I got to page so-and-so of *Animal Liberation*, and I haven't eaten any animal products since. I think that's pretty amazing.

I was not like that. I was a vegetarian for many years before moving towards being vegan. And I'm still not totally strict about it. If someone is serving a cake that has free-range eggs in it, I'll eat it.

It's not a purity thing for me. I'm just trying to minimise the support I give for animals in industrial agriculture, really.

Parts of this conversation have been edited for clarity and brevity.

PHOTO: ISTOCK

the best of your ABC

Costa Georgiadis and Jane Edmanson.

Summer growing

We're heading into the holidays and every one of us knows what that means: more time to garden! It's also a good time to check out the work of friends and neighbours and get some inspiration for the new year. An excellent resource to turn to during the summer break is ABC *Gardening Australia* – just as spreading mulch is an important task to prepare for the hotter months, watching *Gardening Australia* on ABC iview is a great way to get your gardening to-do list ready.

Having recently celebrated 1500 episodes, ABC *Gardening Australia* is an ever-present guide, sharing expert knowledge and experience for all kinds of gardens and gardeners. Each episode is an opportunity to learn something new. You'll find tips for growing berries, bushfoods and beautiful blooms from roses to orchids, as well as ideas to help keep local flora and fauna happy, including encouraging frogs and feathered friends as well as planting wildflowers.

Maybe you are looking for a project to take on this summer? You could install a wicking bed to save water, start your own inground composter, build a strawberry stack or craft an edible wreath with bay leaves. Whether it's growing, maintaining or harvesting, *Gardening Australia* has got you covered.

The final episode for 2024 airs on December 13 but there's plenty to watch on ABC iview whenever you need some inspiration – or an escape from the summer sun.

You can find individual stories on the *Gardening Australia* website, too, accompanied by a factsheet with extra information, tips and plant lists. Follow the *Gardening Australia* YouTube channel, Facebook and Instagram pages for even more gardening content through your summer.

iview Never miss an episode!
Add ABC *Gardening Australia* to your iview watchlist now:
iview.abc.net.au/show/gardening-australia

THIS INFORMATION IS CORRECT AT THE TIME OF PRINTING BUT IS SUBJECT TO CHANGE.

GARDENING ON YOUR ABC RADIO

NSW

ABC Radio Sydney, ABC Radio Central Coast
Saturday 9am

ABC Central West
Saturday 8.30am

ABC Illawarra
Saturday 9am

ABC Mid North Coast, ABC Coffs Coast
Saturday 9.30am

ABC Newcastle, ABC Upper Hunter
Saturday 8.15am

ABC New England North West
Saturday 9am
Thursday 9.30am

ABC North Coast
Saturday 8am

ABC Riverina
Tuesday 9.35am
Saturday 8.30am

ABC South East
Saturday 9am

ABC Western Plains
Saturday 8.30am

WA

ABC Radio Perth, ABC Great Southern, ABC South West, ABC Goldfields, ABC Kimberley, ABC Pilbara, ABC Midwest & Wheatbelt
Tuesday 2.15pm
Saturday 9.05am

NT

ABC Darwin & ABC Katherine
Saturday 9am

ABC Alice Springs & ABC Tennant Creek
Saturday 8.30am

QLD

ABC radio Brisbane
Saturday 6am

ABC Sunshine Coast
Wednesday 9am
Saturday 8.30am

ABC Southern Queensland
Saturday 9am

ABC North Queensland
Friday 10am

ABC Tropical North, ABC Capricornia, ABC Wide Bay, ABC North West QLD, ABC Western QLD
Friday 10am

ABC Far North
Monthly:
Saturday 7.30am

SA

ABC Radio Adelaide, ABC North & West, ABC Eyre Peninsula, ABC South East SA
Saturday 8am

ABC Riverland
Saturday 7am

ABC Broken Hill
Saturday 9am

Statewide, ABC Radio Adelaide, ABC North & West, ABC Eyre Peninsula, ABC South East, ABC Broken Hill, ABC Riverland
Sunday 11am

VIC

ABC radio Melbourne
Saturday 9.10am

ABC Victoria
Monday 9.30am

ABC Southwest Victoria
Thursday 7.20am fortnightly

ACT

ABC radio Canberra
Saturday 8.30am

TAS

ABC radio Hobart, ABC Northern Tasmania
Saturday 9am

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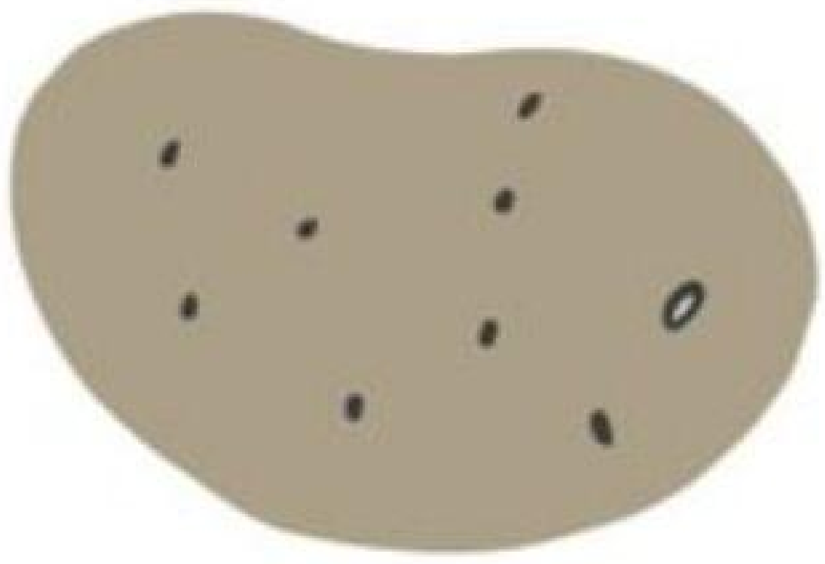

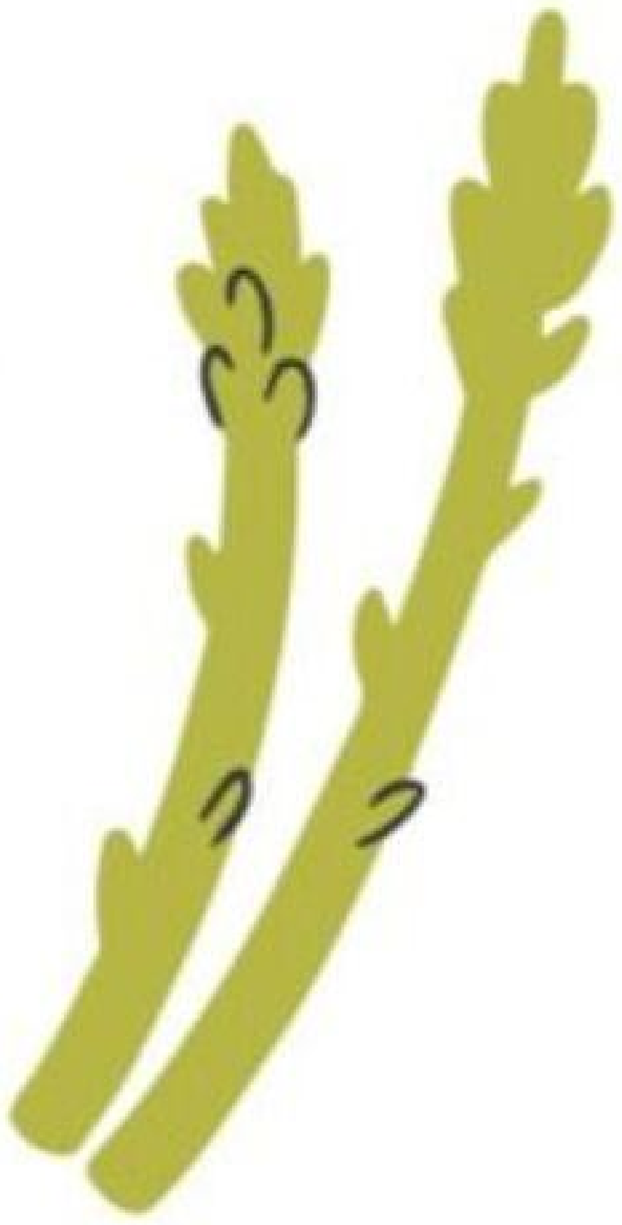

The next gen

Simon Webster delves into the world of hi-tech shopping and finds much to worry about.

The barcode is about to be replaced. If, like me, you've ever spent 10 minutes trying to scan something at a self-service checkout only to be told by some disdainful 16-year-old speaking in a too-loud, too-slow voice that you are holding the item "THE WRONG WAY UP", you may find this news comes as some relief.

However, the bad news is that old-fashioned barcodes are about to be replaced with something even more challenging: next-generation barcodes. And shopping is about to become even more traumatic.

Next-gen barcodes, also known as 2D barcodes, are a bit like those QR codes that no one ever uses. If you can work out how to scan them with your phone, you will not only learn the price of an item, but gain access to a world of information about its provenance and potential. Buying a pack of carrots? A scan may tell you where and when they were grown, how the farm grows them, their nutritional content, how to julienne them without losing a fingertip, and how to recycle the packaging.

As if it's not bad enough scouring ingredient lists in search of palm oil. Imagine comparing farming practices, labour conditions, water use and the cumulative effect on your circular consumption journey. You'd have to take a packed lunch just to get from the sourdoughs to the broccoli.

While all this information might potentially improve transparency and empower consumers to make sustainable choices, it also has the potential, like a lot of things in the information age, to be a tad overwhelming.

It's almost enough to make you want to grow your own food at home. And stay at home, for that matter. As much as possible.

Apparently, Woolworths has been trialling these data-embedded barcodes for some time, and they've helped the supermarket giant keep better track of expiry dates, leading to less food waste, which is great. But as barcode boffins (yes, they're a thing) target global adoption by 2027, we're about to see a lot more next-gen barcodes. And the amount of information they impart to consumers is about to take off.

Of course, shoppers could always avoid all that scanning and information overload, and just head to the organic section and buy some independently certified, sustainably grown food there. But where's the interactive, hi-tech fun in that?

As an *Organic Gardener* reader, what happens in supermarkets probably doesn't affect you that much. Like me, you no doubt grow most of your fresh produce in your backyard, trade with like-minded growers, shop for other fruit and veg at organic farmers' markets, and only attend supermarkets in emergencies. Ahem.

However, if, in the years ahead, you do happen to find yourself in a supermarket aisle, and you see one of these new barcodes, by all means give it a go. Who knows... perhaps it really will impart valuable information to guide you on your journey of ethical consumption.

And if you can't work it out, ask a teenage shop assistant for help. You've probably got the camera facing backwards.

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Written by Phil Dudman

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